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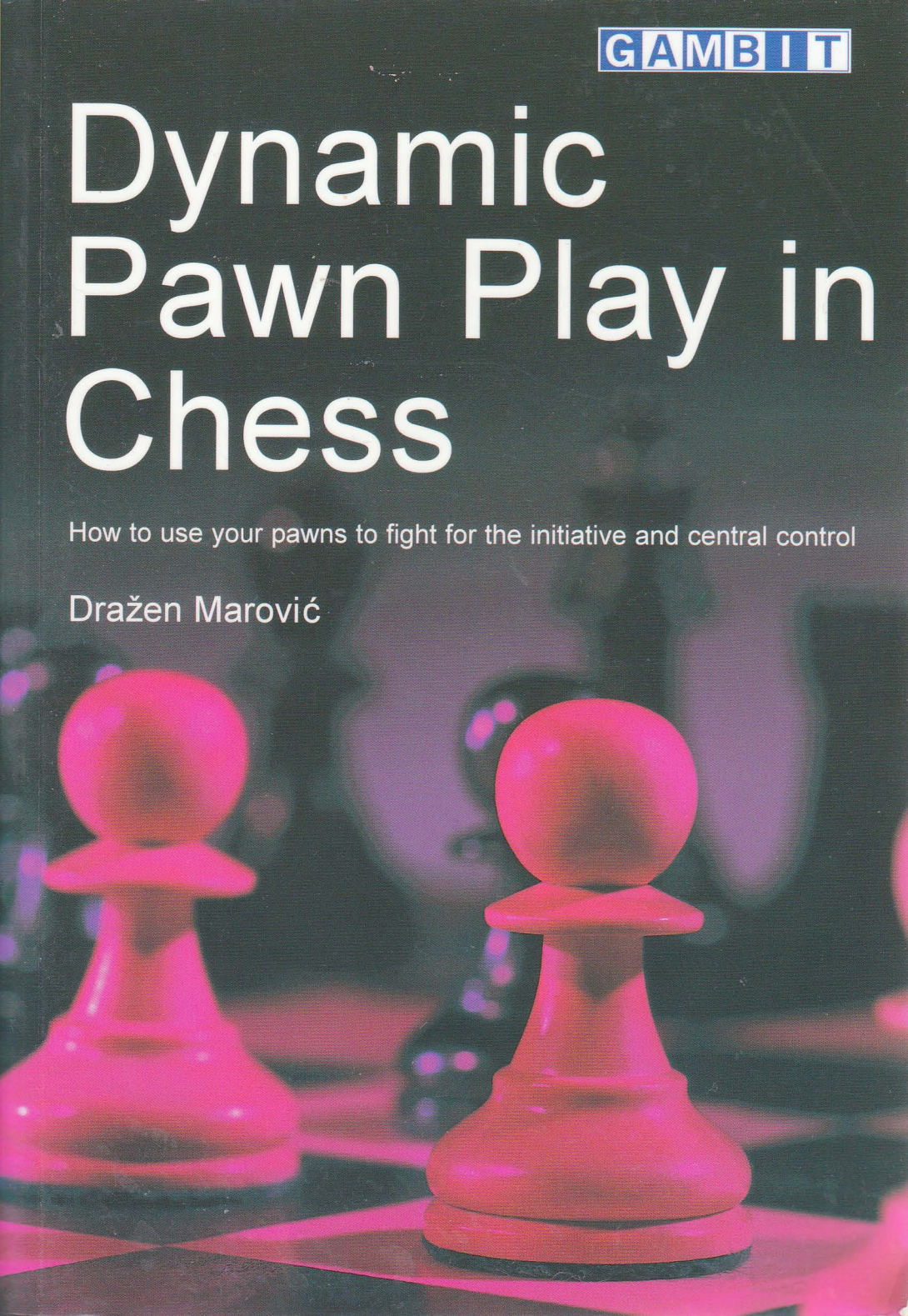
Dynamic Pawn Play in Chess

How to use your pawns to fight for the initiative and central control

Dražen Marović



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First published in the UK by Gambit Publications Ltd 2001
Reprinted 2007
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ISBN-13: 978-1-901983-43-2
ISBN-10: 1-901983-43-9

DISTRIBUTION:
Worldwide (except USA): Central Books Ltd, 99 Wallis Rd, London E9 5LN, England.
Tel +44 (0)20 8986 4854 Fax +44 (0)20 8533 5821.
E-mail: orders@Centralbooks.com

Gambit Publications Ltd, 99 Wallis Rd, London E9 5LN, England.
E-mail: info@gambitbooks.com
Website (regularly updated): www.gambitbooks.com

Edited by Graham Burgess
Typeset by John Nunn
Printed in Great Britain by The Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wilts.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Gambit Publications Ltd
Managing Director: GM Murray Chandler
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Symbols

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
Ch	championship
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(D)	see next diagram

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to Graham Burgess for some pieces of information I was not aware of and for his meticulous queries which pushed me to look into details which even illustrious commentators had often passed over. Thanks, also, for polishing my English.

Dražen Marović

1 A Short Historical Survey

This book is about the centre and pawns, and their intriguing, complex interrelationship. The centre is characterized by its pawn-formation so deeply that even when the central pawns have been exchanged in the early skirmishes, their very absence determines the nature of the play and demands a distinctive and appropriate method of play.

However, the central pawn-formation is not an independent, autonomous part of the pawn-structure as a whole. Every action involving pawns, or even a simple, inoffensive advance of a pawn on the wing, reverberates in the centre and influences its state. This relationship permeates all theoretical systems and their variations so fully that we can state that the history of modern chess ideas is essentially the history of pawn-structures.

In my book *Understanding Pawn Play in Chess*, I explored the basic pawn-formations, those elementary forms in which pawns appear. While examining them, we could perceive how strongly they influence strategic plans in the early phase of the game and determine later events, especially at the sensitive moment of transition from opening into middlegame. We could sense the exceptional significance of the pawns on the central files, as well as their subtle relation with the principles of development and the centre, the keystones of modern opening play. The urgency of economic development is inseparably intertwined with the importance of central pawns. The pawns step forward either to control the central squares and deny them to enemy pieces, or else to occupy them so as to define one's own space, which makes it possible to manoeuvre and to take action.

The concept of the centre always implies the development of pieces and a certain pawn-structure; every opening system and variation is based around the relation between the pawn-formations, pieces and the central squares. In our day, the importance of these relations is unquestioned; it is accepted as an axiom. However, it is the fruit of many years of debate in which the protagonists put forward their conflicting points of view, and over the course of time amended and refined them. The history of modern chess openings from the middle of the 19th century up to the present day has been marked by these changes of opinion and taste. Chess masters observed the pawn-centre in different periods from different angles and this led to a great diversity of playing styles, which has greatly enriched our chess

heritage. In order to see clearly and understand the complex construction of modern opening theory, in this introductory chapter I shall retrace the past epochs, trying to perceive the landmarks and the turning points.

The Romantic Era: Morphy and Anderssen

In spite of the diversity of options, a careful observer of chess history will not miss the fact that some dominant ideas and characteristics mark its crucial periods. We shall start by observing the time and ideas of Paul Morphy and Adolf Anderssen.

Before them, the interpretations of the centre were characterized by a certain naïvety of pioneer days or in the best case they can be ascribed to a small number of great masters of the chessboard living and playing ahead of their time. In the play of Morphy and Anderssen, as well as the young Steinitz and a number of other masters, we perceive for the first time that the stormy, brilliant games characterizing the second half of the 19th century were governed by a well-studied method of play in the open positions that generally arose. The chess master of the period did not build a pawn-centre and he did not use pawns to occupy the vital squares of the board. On the contrary, pawns were used to disintegrate the centre, which rapidly became open following early exchanges. It is that disintegrating, open centre we can look upon as characteristic of the period and the method of play can be seen as the most valuable legacy of the epoch. A couple of selected games will illustrate this point.

Morphy – Anderssen
Match (game 7), Paris 1858
Scandinavian Defence

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♕xd5 3 ♘c3 ♕a5 4 d4 e5?!

The purpose of this move is to annihilate the pawn-centre, but as we shall see it has its price. The more cautious 4...♘f6 is a better option.

5 dxe5 ♕xe5+

The books I consulted regularly recommended 5...♗b4 as better, which I doubt very much indeed. The simple 6 ♘f3 is then favourable for White. Having written this, I found the relatively recent game Ivanchuk-Angelov, Varna 1987, which continued 5...♘c6 6 ♘f3 ♗b4 7 ♗d2 ♗g4 8 a3 ♘d4 9 ♗b5+ c6 (9...♘xb5 loses to 10 axb4 ♕xb4 11 ♖a4) 10 0-0!! ♗xf3 (10...cxb5 loses to 11 axb4 ♕xb4 12 ♘xb5 ♕xb5 13 ♘xd4 ♕d7 14 ♘f3 ♗xf3 15 gxf3) 11 axb4! ♗xd1 (or 11...♕xb4 12 gxf3 ♘xb5 13 ♘e4 ♕d4 14 ♕e2) 12 bxa5 ♗xc2 13 ♗a4! and Black had an uphill struggle ahead of him, according to Ivanchuk.

6 ♗e2 ♗b4 7 ♘f3!

White relies upon development. He correctly assesses that his bishop-pair and quicker development will represent excellent compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

7...♗xc3+ 8 bxc3 ♕xc3+ 9 ♗d2 ♕c5 10 ♖b1

Having achieved a lead in development, White strives to keep it. At a certain point, ♖b5 might well come in handy, but hindering the development of the c8-bishop is the main purpose of the move.

10...♘c6 11 0-0 ♘f6 12 ♗f4 0-0 13 ♗xc7

White would do better to delay recapturing material. 13 ♖b5 ♕e7 14 ♖e1 keeps the pressure and the initiative.

13...♘d4

Black takes the opportunity to simplify. The alternative is 13...♘d5.

14 ♕xd4 ♕xc7 15 ♗d3 ♗g4?

In positions with an open centre, there is great scope for tactics. Therefore, the defender should be constantly wary of combinative blows. The circumspect 15...h6 is a useful measure against the following tactical threats. Besides, the quiet 15...b6 comes into consideration.

16 ♘g5!

White threatens 17 ♘xh7.

16...♖fd8

16...♗h5, intending to play the natural ...♗g6, fails to 17 ♘e4 ♘g4 18 ♘g3. 16...h6 is also met by 17 ♘e4.

17 ♕b4 ♗c8

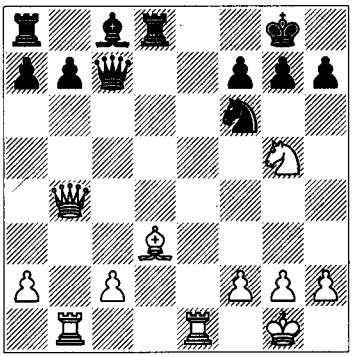
The b7- and h7-pawns are hanging, and this causes Black to defend passively. 17...a5 18 ♕xb7 ♕xb7 19 ♖xb7 ♗h5 was a reasonable alternative.

18 ♖fe1 *(D)*

While Black's queenside sleeps happily, White activates all his forces. The balance of power has turned in White's favour and defensive measures are not at hand.

18...a5

B



It seems as if 18...h6 parries the imminent threats and will restore the balance after White retreats his knight. However, Morphy had a devilish idea in mind. He planned 19 ♖e7 ♗d7 (not 19...♖d7 because of 20 ♖e8+) 20 ♘xf7 ♘d5 21 ♘xh6+ gxh6 (if 21...♔h8, then 22 ♕b3 ♘xe7 23 ♕g8+ ♘xg8 24 ♘f7#) 22 ♗h7+ ♔f8 23 ♖e8++ and now 23...♔g7 24 ♕f8+, etc., or alternatively 23...♔xe8 24 ♗g6#.

With the text-move, Anderssen avoids the trap, but White's active pieces make prosaic solutions possible as well.

19 ♕e7 ♕xe7 20 ♖xe7 ♘d5

Black is lost anyway, but this move makes White's task simple.

21 ♗xh7+ ♔h8 22 ♖xf7 ♘c3 23 ♖e1 ♘xa2 24 ♖f4 ♖a6 25 ♗d3 1-0

Rosanes – Anderssen

Breslau 1861

King's Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 f4 d5 3 exd5 e4 4 ♗b5+?!

Today we know of better continuations, but there was little established

theory in those days. It was the time of exploration, when players often forgot that material advantage was not necessarily worth so much.

4...c6 5 dxc6 ♘xc6

Recapturing with the pawn gains a tempo and is more energetic.

6 ♘c3?!

6 d4 is White's most natural continuation.

6...♘f6 7 ♕e2 ♗c5!

A powerful developing move. With obvious threats on the e-file in the air, Black does not worry about the e4-pawn. The key idea is to develop, and engage one's forces in the battle as quickly as possible.

8 ♘xe4 0-0 9 ♗xc6 bxc6 10 d3

Again we see a typical game of the day: a lead in development is pitted against a material advantage in a position with an open centre; the scene is charged with tactical threats.

10...♖e8 11 ♗d2 ♘xe4 12 dxe4 ♗f5 13 e5 ♕b6 14 0-0-0

Out of the frying pan and into the fire!

14...♗d4 15 c3

Or 15 b3 ♕c5.

15...♖ab8 16 b3 ♖ed8

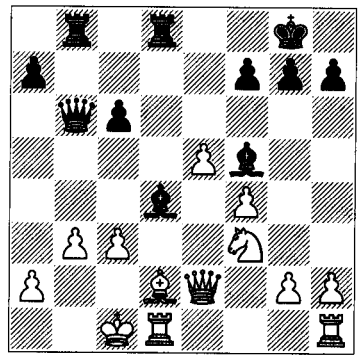
The king is kept in the mating net (now 17 cxd4? would be answered by 17...♕xd4 and mate at a1) – a nice little touch preparing the final blow.

However, Black had a more clinical finish in 16...♕a5! 17 ♗e1 (after 17 ♔b2 ♗c5, 18 b4 loses to 18...♖xb4+ 19 cxb4 ♗d4+, while 18 ♗c1 loses to 18...♗a3+ 19 ♔a1 ♖xb3) and now 17...♖xb3 or 17...♗xc3.

17 ♘f3? *(D)*

A blunder, but after the forced 17 g4, 17...♗e6 creates new threats.

B



17...♕xb3! 18 axb3 ♖xb3 19 ♗e1 ♗e3+ 0-1

The lesson of these short, exciting games is clear. In the sharp positions arising from the king's pawn openings, the aim of both sides was to develop quickly, to seize the initiative and to attack first. In order to achieve that, no sacrifice was considered too risky. Chess was played with delight and abandon. With such an attitude underpinning it, the game of chess was an open fight. The centre was subordinate to the principle of development. The structure often broke down in the early phase of the game. The central pawns were exchanged or sacrificed in order to seize the initiative. The centre was open, inviting vivid tactical play. It was time that counted; each tempo was priceless.

Players of the romantic period explored open positions, understood the appropriate methods and employed

them, deeply conscious of what they were doing, although quite often their endeavours left an impression of improvisation. Mikhail Botvinnik was absolutely right when he affirmed that "in the handling of open positions nothing new has been found after Morphy". Naturally, times have changed. Positions with an open centre are rarer since open gambits have become less common, while the modern positions where they appear are far removed from the simplicity of those days. Sometimes more sophisticated procedures are required, but the essential method of play has remained the same. When we reach the subject of the open centre, we shall become aware of how much we owe to Paul Morphy and his unforgettable generation.

The Positional School

However, at the end of the 19th century, some new thinkers had some new ideas. On the one hand, the decades of the second half of the 19th century had seen protracted investigations of the open games, and some players began to tire of this. Furthermore, chess masters became increasingly aware of other options. Attacks did not yield as much as earlier, since the level of defence had improved over many years of master tournaments. To develop quickly and seek an early initiative was not enough. An awareness grew that in order to attack, one must first create the right conditions for it. One had to perceive weaknesses in the opponent's position and exert pressure against them. Players became aware of positional nuances and learnt how to take advantage of positional errors. Perceiving the importance of weak squares and points, chess masters appreciated the importance of pawns, especially those on the central files.

The central squares and central pawns acquired a new significance. The pawn-centre mattered, after all. It was worthwhile investing tempi in the construction of a centre. Therefore, the central pawns were firmly established on the central squares, and claimed a share of power in the crucial part of the board. They made possible and directed the development of pieces in harmony with a fixed, symmetrical centre. 1 e4 was met by 1...e5, and 1 d4 by 1...d5. Wilhelm Steinitz explained the theoretical basis of the natural positional balance and the new creed stimulated interest and opened the door to queen's pawn openings, most notably the Queen's Gambit with its numerous ramifications. Steinitz emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong central point and was ready to prop it up and grimly hold on to it for as long as possible. In his matches with Chigorin, he went so far that some of his attempts today look bizarre (supporting the e5-pawn by an early ...♕f6, for instance). However, his view of the centre was somewhat static and we could say that his view of chess in general was rather static. If it contained no weaknesses, then, according to Steinitz, it was worth playing. He underrated the dynamic possibilities that slowly change relations on the

board and cause crevices in the defensive line, especially at the moment when the more passive side is compelled to open the position.

It was only in the first decades of the 20th century that the leading positional players, Akiba Rubinstein and Jose Raul Capablanca, saw the value of the stable centre in a broader perspective, formulating far-reaching strategic plans around it. The centre acquired a new value.

Some games from the period will help illuminate this discussion.

Chigorin – Steinitz
World Ch match (game 1), Havana 1892
Evans Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4

This gambit is a legitimate attempt to quicken White's development by a relatively small material sacrifice.

4...♗xb4 5 c3 ♗a5

Steinitz generally chose this line.

6 0-0

After 6 d4 exd4 7 0-0 the best advice one could give to Black is not to become greedy, and to think primarily about his own development. Thus, 7...♘ge7 8 cxd4 d5 9 exd5 ♘xd5 leads to a balanced position. The text-move is less aggressive, but Chigorin had a good reason to play it: in their first match (in 1889), Steinitz had regularly played 6...♕f6, a variation White would have been happy to repeat!

6...d6

This is certainly more natural: the centre is strengthened and at the same time the door to the light-squared bishop is opened.

7 d4 ♗g4?!

Seeking a radical method to circumvent White's attacking ideas, at this point Lasker found a simple answer: 7...♗b6, offering the continuation 8 dxe5 dxe5, when after 9 ♕xd8+ ♘xd8 10 ♘xe5, 10...♗e6 equalizes. Obviously, he took into consideration 9 ♕b3 ♕f6 10 ♗g5 ♕g6 11 ♗b5 ♘e7 12 ♗xe7 ♔xe7.

The text-move is ostensibly a consistent reaction in the battle for the centre. By pinning the knight, Black exerts pressure on the vital central points d4 and e5. Besides, he must have taken into consideration the possible reply 8 ♕b3, when 8...♗xf3 9 gxf3 ♗b6 10 ♗xf7+ ♔f8 would suit him well. Unfortunately, Black asks for more than the position offers.

8 ♗b5

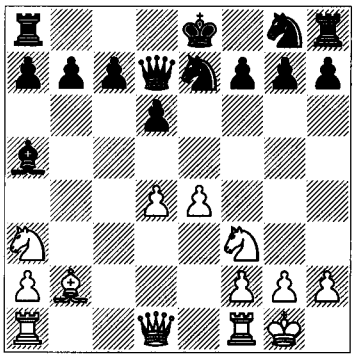
There is more logic behind this pin. It increases White's influence in the centre, forcing Black to give ground. Chigorin also played 8 ♕a4 in this match, when 8...exd4 9 cxd4 a6 10 ♗d5 ♗b6 was recommended for Black, giving back material in order to finish his development.

8...exd4 9 cxd4 ♗d7 10 ♗b2 ♘ce7?!

Later in the match, Steinitz chose the more solid 10...♘f6. With the text-move, Black looks for simplification and relief by forcing the exchange of a set of bishops, but he does not solve his crucial problem – underdevelopment.

11 ♗xd7+ ♕xd7 12 ♘a3! *(D)*

B



A strong move, of the type Steinitz used to miss or underestimate in his assessment of positions. It is true that his position looks defensible for the time being and has no obvious weaknesses, but he will eventually have to make concessions to White's superior active forces.

12...♘h6 13 ♘c4 ♗b6 14 a4 c6

By provoking this move, White has forced a weakening of the point d6.

15 e5

White's choice was between winning back the material by 15 d5 0-0 16 ♘xb6 axb6 17 ♕d4 and preventing Black from castling with the text-move. It would not have been a difficult decision.

15...d5 16 ♘d6+ ♔f8 17 ♗a3 ♔g8

17...♘hf5 fails to 18 e6 fxe6 19 ♘e5 ♕d8 20 ♘xf5 exf5 21 ♕h5. The king, therefore, runs out of the pin.

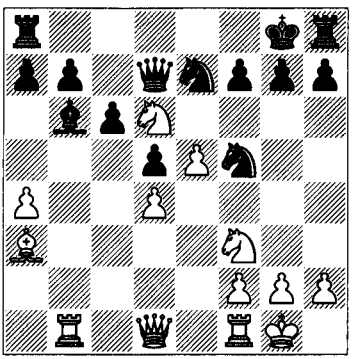
18 ♖b1

Penetration to the seventh rank is not the only purpose of this move. Sooner or later the rook can be transferred via the open third rank into the attack on the kingside.

18...♘hf5 *(D)*

18...♘c8 19 a5 ♘xd6 20 exd6 ♗xa5 21 ♘e5 hardly comes into consideration for Black.

W



Black's actual move brings the knight back from the sidelines but sets the scene for a beautiful tactical blow...

19 ♘xf7! ♔xf7 20 e6+ ♔xe6 21 ♘e5!

The hidden point! By attacking the queen, White keeps the black king in the centre just long enough to engage the rook in the attack on the e-file. Many analysts tried to refute the sacrifice. Lasker himself proposed 21...♕e8 (denying h5 to the white queen) 22 ♖e1 ♔f6. A long time was to pass until in 1948 an obscure Soviet player demonstrated 23 ♗xe7+ ♘xe7 24 ♕f3+ ♔e6 25 ♘f7+ ♔d7 26 ♕g4+ ♔c7 27 ♕f4+ ♔d7 28 ♕d6+ ♔c8 29 ♖xe7, etc.

21...♕c8 22 ♖e1 ♔f6 23 ♕h5 g6

23...♘g6 parries the mate, but then 24 g4 decides.

24 ♗xe7+ ♔xe7

24...♘xe7 is not better due to 25 ♕h4+ g5 26 ♘g4+, etc.

25 ♘xg6++ ♔f6 26 ♘xh8 ♗xd4

Played in order to prevent 27 ♖e5, which would be the reply to 26...♕xh8. 26...♕d7 loses to 27 ♖b3 ♖xh8 28 ♖f3 ♖g8 29 ♖e5.

27 ♖b3

The patient rook has lived to see its intentions realized.

27...♕d7 28 ♖f3 ♖xh8 29 g4 ♖g8 30 ♕h6+ ♖g6 31 ♖xf5+ 1-0

The mature Steinitz left behind the open positions of his youth and in his older days contested his battles on new territory. It was not the initiative any more, but the strength of the position that mattered. That strength was built from the very first move by establishing a firm point in the centre and defending it. However, from studying his matches versus Chigorin, an awareness grew that standing passively firm in the centre was not enough and that superior active forces will provoke cracks in the defensive wall sooner or later. It paid off to share the centre or to dominate it only if active plans could be realized owing to its stability. Achieving the right balance was an awesome task, left to a number of chess giants at the beginning of the 20th century.

Rubinstein – Takacs

Budapest 1926

Queen's Gambit

1 c4 ♘f6 2 d4 e6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♗g5 ♘bd7 5 e3 ♗e7 6 ♘f3 0-0 7 ♖c1 c6 8 ♕c2 a6 9 cxd5 exd5

We have arrived at a structure characteristic of the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit. d4 was met by the symmetrical ...d5, the central files are closed and influence on the central squares is shared.

10 ♗d3 ♖e8 11 0-0 ♘f8

In this type of position Black hopes to play the simplifying 12...♘e4, and in order to carry it out he must first take care of the h7-pawn. If he played 11...g6 with the same intention, then 12 ♗f4 would avoid it.

12 ♖fe1

After this, 12...♘e4 may be met by 13 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 ♘d2 f5 16 f3, which favours White.

12...♗g4?!

If we examine the position attentively, we shall come to prefer Capablanca's 12...♗e6. The continuation 13 ♘a4 ♘6d7, as played in Alekhine-Capablanca, World Ch match (game 25), Buenos Aires 1927, retains the harmony of Black's position and eases his problems. 12...♘h5 also comes into consideration.

13 ♘d2

White could also continue 13 ♘e5 ♗h5 14 ♕b3 ♖b8 15 h3, getting ready to meet 15...♘6d7 with the active 16 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 17 f4.

13...♘6d7

Seeking simplifications by 13...♘h5 came into consideration again, as well as 13...♗h5 planning 14...♗g6. This time the routine, freeing knight move does not work...

14 ♗f4 ♗g5 15 h3!

The little missing detail in Black's plans: the expected exchange of the

dark-squared bishops is not possible because after 15...♗xf4 16 exf4 the light-squared bishop is trapped. Therefore, Black has merely lost time.

15...♗h5 16 ♗h2 ♗g6 17 ♗xg6 hxg6 18 ♕b3 ♕b6 19 ♘a4

Having avoided early central simplifications, White slowly turns towards the queenside. His secure kingside and the stable centre augur well for queenside play. The exchange of queens also suits White, as he possesses a superior bishop and his knights are ready to make use of the weakened dark squares on the queenside.

19...♕xb3 20 ♘xb3 ♘e6?!

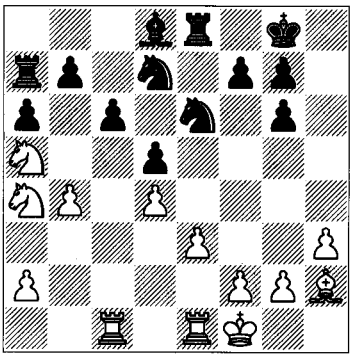
From the further course of the struggle we shall conclude that controlling the a5-square is important. Therefore, 20...♗d8 is called for, giving the unemployed bishop a meaningful role.

21 ♘a5 ♖a7 22 ♔f1

Necessary in order to play 23 ♖c3.

22...♗d8 23 b4! *(D)*

B



The bishop move came too late and now White has secured a strong grip on the queenside. His wing action comes somewhat later than usual in this type of position, but it is in full harmony with the pawn-structure.

23...f5

One might be tempted to get rid of the long-ranged h2-bishop by playing 23...♗c7, but then 24 ♗xc7 ♘xc7 25 ♘c5 provokes the unpleasant exchange at c5.

24 ♘b2

The knight is bound for its natural seat at d3.

24...g5 25 ♘d3 ♔f7 26 ♖c2 ♗b6 27 ♗d6

White makes sure he can recapture on c5 with the b-pawn.

27...♘d8 28 ♘c5

The plan is impressively simple: its final aim is obviously the lasting weakness at b7.

28...♘xc5 29 ♗xc5 ♗xc5 30 bxc5 ♔e7 31 ♖b2

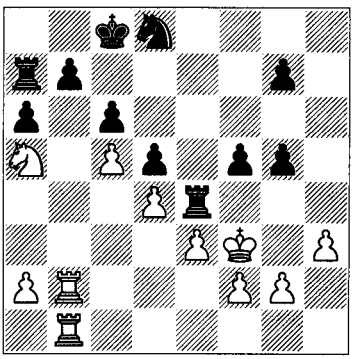
The first step: to tie enemy forces to defence.

31...♔d7 32 ♖eb1 ♔c8 33 ♔e2

The second step: to activate the king.

33...♖e7 34 ♔f3 ♖e4 *(D)*

W



35 g4!

The third step: having tied his opponent's hands on the queenside, it is time to transfer operations to the other front.

35...g6 36 ♖g1 ♘f7 37 h4!

Penetrating to the seventh rank is worth the temporary pawn sacrifice.

37...gxh4 38 gxf5 gxf5 39 ♖g7 ♘d8 40 ♖g8 f4 41 ♖h8 fxe3 42 fxe3 ♔d7 43 ♖g2 ♖e8 44 ♖xh4 ♖e7 45 ♖h8 ♔c7 46 ♖gg8 ♖d7 47 ♘b3

The knight has done its duty at a5. Following the route b3-c1-d3, it is destined to strike the final blow.

47...a5 48 ♘c1 ♖a8 49 ♘d3 b5 50 cxb6+ ♔xb6 51 ♘c5 ♖d6 52 a4 ♖c8 53 ♔g4 1-0

Aware of the inevitable zugzwang, Black resigned. Leaning on the firm, stable centre, Rubinstein was able to take action on one side, render his opponent passive and then switch the action victoriously to the other wing.

Bogoljubow – Capablanca

New York 1924

Queen's Pawn

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 e3 e6 4 ♗d3 c5 5 b3 ♘c6 6 0-0 ♗d6 7 ♗b2 0-0

White does not strive to increase the pressure on d5. Instead, his early fianchetto secures his dominance of e5. Black counters by placing his pieces on the best available squares. The dark-squared bishop is particularly well placed for further developments.

8 ♘bd2 ♕e7

Threatening 9...e5 and provoking White's next move.

9 ♘e5 cxd4 10 exd4 ♗a3

The exchange of dark-squared bishops is a small positional victory in itself. Black prepared it with the clever 6...♗d6 and it could have been prevented only by the somewhat slow move 8 a3, which was recommended by Panov.

11 ♗xa3 ♕xa3 12 ♘df3

Since now 12...♘b4 could be well met by 13 ♕c1, the text-move is reasonable, but 12 ♘xc6 looks simpler.

12...♗d7 13 ♘xc6

In case of 13 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 14 c4 Black replies 14...♘b4.

13...♗xc6 14 ♕d2

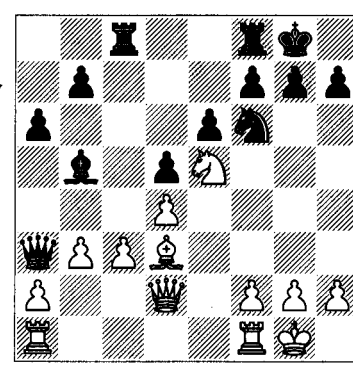
At this point 14 ♕c1 would have further simplified the position and rid White of the black queen's most unwelcome presence on a3.

14...♖ac8 15 c3?!

This time-wasting and weakening move was surely caused by that false sense of security which in this type of simple position is not so rare. Black, however, scrutinizes the position much more deeply...

15...a6! 16 ♘e5 ♗b5 *(D)*

W



With the pawn-centre fixed, Black turns to the queenside, where the backward pawn at c3 becomes the target of lasting pressure. Note that 16 ♕e2 would not have thwarted Black's idea because 16...♕a5 would have made it possible again.

17 f3

17 ♗xb5 axb5 would simply worsen White's position and allow Black pressure on two semi-open files on the queenside; White would have to withstand a long siege of the c3-pawn. Besides, when contemplating 17 ♗xb5 Bogoljubow must have recollected what happened to Janowski in his game with Capablanca, also in New York but eight years earlier, when Capablanca's doubled b-pawns played a major role in Janowski's downfall.

17...♗xd3 18 ♘xd3 ♖c7

The first task is to immobilize the c3-pawn. The following moves are all concerned with this point.

19 ♖ac1 ♖fc8 20 ♖c2 ♘e8

In numerous positions from queen's pawn openings, the d6-square is reserved for the knight. From d6 it will control c4, hindering White's ideas of advancing his backward pawn, and at any moment either ...♘b5 or ...♘f5 could have grave consequences for White.

21 ♖fc1 ♘d6 22 ♘e5?!

Alekhine severely criticized this move and proposed 22 ♘c5 b6 23 ♘a4; this criticism was echoed by Panov and some other commentators. As a matter of fact, after 23...♖c6, planning 24...♘b7, Black keeps his advantage, but we must agree that White cannot improve his chances by doing nothing.

22...♕a5!

By threatening 23...♘b5, Black provokes the following erroneous reaction.

23 a4?

Whenever a pawn is moved, some weak squares appear around it. At times such weaknesses are decisive and it is only with great caution that a pawn move should be made. 23 ♘d3 b6 (or 23...♘b5 24 ♘c5) 24 a4 keeps White's chances alive.

23...♕b6!

The culmination of a brilliant positional strategy. White's pawn-formation has been so much weakened that he inevitably suffers material loss. The resignation which follows is understandable...

24 ♘d3

Neither 24 b4 a5 25 b5 ♘c4 26 ♘xc4 (or 26 ♕e2 ♕d6) 26...♖xc4 27 ♖a1 e5 nor 24 ♖b2 ♘f5! 25 ♖bb1 f6 26 ♘g4 e5 gives White any hope.

24...♕xb3 25 ♘c5 ♕b6 26 ♖b2 ♕a7 27 ♕e1 b6 28 ♘d3 ♖c4 29 a5

Or 29 ♖a2 ♕c7 30 ♖a3 ♘f5, etc.

29...bxa5 30 ♘c5 ♘b5 31 ♖e2

Bad, but in a lost position it makes no difference apart from allowing Capablanca to finish brilliantly:

31...♘xd4! 32 cxd4 ♖8xc5 0-1

These two games, played with an impressive clarity of thought, represent an outstanding lecture on the advantages of keeping the centre closed, as this provides enough security to make wing activity both feasible and

promising. Dozens of high-level games in the early decades of the 20th century left no doubt whatever that the hidden meanings of the closed centre were absorbed and this knowledge put into practice. Rubinstein and Capablanca overcame the dogmatic tendencies of the past. They based their plans on the far-reaching positional implications of the central structure, which they saw as the germ of middle-game play. The positional school reached its peak, Steinitz already belonged to the past and we crossed the threshold of the modern age.

The Hypermoderns

In parallel with the maturing of the positional school, in the 1920s and 1930s a new school of thought developed. They called themselves 'hypermoderns' and their ideas had a dramatic impact on the problem of the pawn-centre. Their spiritual leaders, Aron Nimzowitsch and Richard Réti, published their revolutionary works in the 1920s. Réti's *New Ideas in Chess* came out in 1922, while Nimzowitsch's editions of *My System* started in Berlin in 1925. These two books left an indelible trace in the decades to come. They felt that the fixed centre limited the scope for imaginative play, directing plans towards well-trodden paths. They also rejected the emphasis placed on 'rules' in previous teachings. On the contrary, they were eager to explore exceptions to these 'rules'. Striving to do so, they introduced some utterly new concepts. Especially significant was their view of the centre. Considering it a principle of opening strategy, they supported the view that the centre should neither be occupied by pawns nor left to disintegrate. The centre, they proclaimed, should be controlled by pieces. It meant completely new pawn-structures in the centre, flexible use of pawns in the early phase of the game and maximum cooperation of pawns and pieces. Whole new openings were born on that basis: the Nimzo-Indian and the Queen's Indian Defence in the first place, but also the Réti Opening, the Alekhine Defence and some minor things as well.

We shall investigate the essentials of the theoretical opinion of the epoch and its bearing on grandmaster practice with the help of a number of relevant games...

Réti – Pokorny
Mährisch Ostrau 1923
Réti Opening

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 b4

This move came into use following the adoption of the early fianchetto by 3 b3. White concluded that while preparing the fianchetto he could also seize space on the queenside. In the early phase of the game he does not occupy the central squares with pawns. Instead he uses his minor pieces to control the important central squares.

3...♗g7 4 ♗b2 0-0 5 g3 d5?!

It is not in Black's interest to offer the exchange of the dark-squared bishops. In Réti-Capablanca, New York

1924, Black chose the more logical 5...b6, opposing White's bishops with a double fianchetto of his own.

6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 8 ♕b3 ♘f6

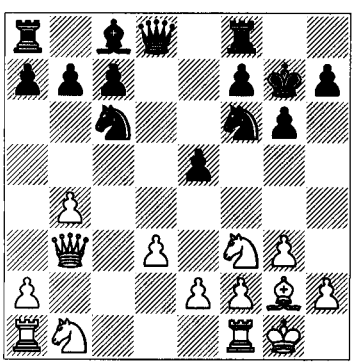
8...a5 9 b5 ♕d6 was proposed instead.

9 ♗g2 ♘c6 10 0-0 e5

Another questionable decision. At c6 the knight will be exposed to the advance of the b-pawn as well as on the h1-a8 diagonal. Furthermore, the e5-pawn will also come under pressure.

11 d3 *(D)*

B



Against Black's shaky occupation of the centre, there stands White's modest but sound central pawn-structure. This determines White's further steps. The queen's knight will move to d2, strengthening the e4-square and vacating the first rank for ♖ac1. The pressure on the semi-open c-file and along the h1-a8 diagonal can be enhanced by a later b5, while ♕b2 will cause difficulties to the e5-pawn, and the d2-knight will move into battle on the queenside via b3. The logic of this strategic plan is in deep harmony with the pawn-structure, so much so that we could say it springs from it.

11...♗g4

11...♘d4 would be comfortably met by 12 ♕b2, putting the queen on a square where it belongs anyway.

12 ♘bd2 ♕e7 13 b5!

This is the proper moment to push Black into passivity.

13...♘d8

Black was probably counting on 13...♘d4, but then understood that after 14 ♘xd4 exd4 15 ♖fe1 his pawn-formation would remain under strong pressure.

14 ♕b2 ♘d7 15 ♖ac1 ♖c8

15...c6 16 h3 does not bring Black relief.

16 h3 ♗xf3 17 ♗xf3 f6 18 ♖c3

Black has managed to protect the e5-pawn and his backward queenside pawns on b7 and c7 by retreating into passivity on his back ranks. However, after the text-move a new weakness becomes apparent – the a7-pawn.

18...b6 19 ♕a3! ♘c5

A transition to an endgame would simplify White's path to victory.

20 ♘b3 ♘de6 21 ♘xc5 ♘xc5 22 ♕xa7 ♕d7

Given that the double attack fails, 22...f5 is somewhat better.

23 a4 f5

23...♕xh3 would maintain the material balance, but 24 a5 is a strong reply.

24 ♗c6 ♕d4 25 ♖c4 ♕d8 26 a5 ♖f7 27 ♖xc5!

The passed a-pawn crowns Réti's superior strategy.

27...bxc5 28 ♕xc5 ♕f6 29 a6 ♖ff8 30 a7 1-0

Nimzowitsch – Spielmann

New York 1927
Réti Opening

1 ♘f3 d5 2 b3 c5 3 ♗b2 ♘c6?!

White's initial moves determine his opening strategy. Instead of occupying the centre with pawns, he intends to control it using his pieces. The e5-square is of special interest to him. Just because of that we note an imprecision in the chosen move-order, which the sharp analytical mind of Robert Fischer noticed at once in his candidates match in 1971 against Tigran Petrosian. He met 3 ♗b2 with 3...f6, building a full pawn-centre and blocking the fianchettoed bishop's diagonal. Therefore, 3 e3 was called for, when 3...f6 is futile due to 4 d4, but 3...♘f6 would be correct. Black in his turn develops the queen's knight, which I consider a more serious error – we shall soon see why.

4 e3 ♘f6 5 ♗b5

This pin strengthens White's grip on the centre. Thanks to the simple possibility of eliminating the c6-knight at will, he achieves lasting control of the important e5-square. If Black wishes to adopt this set-up, then he should postpone the development of his queen's knight.

5...♗d7

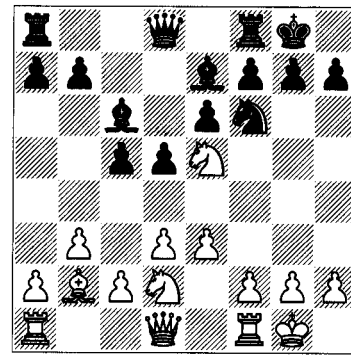
5...e6 6 ♘e5 ♕c7 7 0-0 ♗d6 would be even worse. To this day I remember a game between two players who were at the time both strong international masters: 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 f4 0-0 10 ♖f3 ♘d7 11 ♖h3 g6?? 12 ♕h5! and the purpose of White's fianchetto was demonstrated impressively in the game Plachetka-Zinn, Dečin 1974.

6 0-0 e6 7 d3

Note the flexible, modest use of pawns in harmony with strategic aims: the king's knight will move to e5, while the queen's knight will follow in its footsteps via d2 to cement White's lasting influence on the dark-squared diagonal a1-h8.

7...♗e7 8 ♘bd2 0-0 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 ♘e5 *(D)*

B



The first part of the plan has been fulfilled. The centralized knight, supported by the b2-bishop, controls the centre strongly. Having achieved that aim, White can proceed to take action on the kingside, towards which his forces are naturally directed. The expected 11 f4 will make it possible.

10...♖c8

The question is how to fight the growing pressure on the kingside. In Nimzowitsch-Rubinstein, Semmering

1926, Black defended by 10...♗e8 11 f4 ♘d7, when 12 ♕g4 ♘xe5 13 fxe5 would have been favourable for White. In case of 10...♘d7, White, of course, does not take on c6, but logically continues 11 ♘df3, ready to replace one knight with the other.

11 f4 ♘d7 12 ♕g4 ♘xe5

12...f5? does not work due to 13 ♕xg7+.

13 ♗xe5

More natural than closing the diagonal by 13 fxe5.

13...♗f6 14 ♖f3

White transfers his forces to active positions on the kingside while maintaining the perfect harmony of his pawns and pieces.

14...♗xe5

The situation becomes critical and each loss of time makes a huge difference. Fischer-Mecking, Interzonal tournament, Palma de Mallorca 1970, is an exemplary warning: 14...♕e7 15 ♖af1 a5 16 ♖g3 ♗xe5 17 fxe5 f5 18 exf6 ♖xf6 19 ♕xg7+! ♕xg7 20 ♖xf6 with a large advantage for White.

15 fxe5 ♕c7

After 15...f5, 16 exf6 ♖xf6 17 ♖af1 keeps the pressure.

16 ♕h5 h6?

16...f5 would fail to 17 exf6 ♖xf6 18 ♖xf6 gxf6 19 ♕g4+ ♔f7 20 ♖f1, but the hidden defensive possibility 16...♗e8!?, demonstrated by Nimzowitsch, prepares ...f5 and was indispensable for the defence of Black's kingside.

17 ♖af1 g6

It is too late for 17...♗e8. Then 18 ♖g3 f5 19 ♕xh6 ♕xe5 20 ♕f4 ♕xf4 21 exf4 gives White a favourable endgame in which his pawn-structure is the sounder and his knight will be superior to Black's bishop. What is more, after 18 ♖f6 ♕a5 19 ♘f3 ♕c3, the sharp 20 ♖xh6 gxh6 21 ♕xh6, suggested by Burgess, risks little for a promising attack. For instance: 21...f5 (21...f6 fails to 22 ♘g5 ♖c7 23 ♘xe6 ♖cf7 24 exf6 followed by 25 ♘xf8) 22 ♘g5 ♖c7 (if 22...♖f7, then White continues 23 ♕xe6 ♖d8 24 ♘xf7 ♗xf7 25 ♕xf5) 23 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 (23...♗f7 loses to 24 ♕xf5 and 23...♖cf7 to 24 ♘xf7, etc.) 24 h3.

18 ♕xh6 ♕xe5 19 ♖f6

The threat is imminent: 20 g4 followed by 21 ♖1f3 and 22 ♖h3 would win. Black will have to give up a pawn to prevent the worst.

19...♕h5 20 ♕xh5 gxh5 21 ♘f3 ♖c7

21...♔g7 fails to 22 ♘g5.

22 ♖h6 f6 23 ♘h4 ♗e8 24 ♖hxf6 ♖xf6 25 ♖xf6 ♖e7 26 ♔f2 ♔g7 27 ♖f4 ♗d7 28 ♔e2?!

We shall see that 28 ♔e1 would have been more precise. This imprecision will make the road to victory much longer.

28...e5 29 ♖f5 ♖e8 30 ♖f2

If the king were at e1, White would proceed ♖xh5. This way he will have to play some 20 moves more...

30...e4 31 ♖f4 ♖e5 32 ♔d2 b5 33 g3 ♗h3 34 d4 cxd4 35 exd4 ♖g5 36 c3 a5 37 ♖f2 a4 38 ♔e3 a3 39 ♖c2 ♗f1 40 ♖c1 ♗d3 41 ♘g2 ♖f5 42 ♘f4 ♔f7 43 ♖d1 ♔e7 44 ♘xd3 exd3 45 b4 ♔d6 46 ♔xd3 ♖f2 47 ♖d2 ♖f3+ 48 ♔c2 ♔e6 49 ♖e2+ ♔d6 50 ♔b3

♖d3 51 ♖e5 h4 52 gxh4 ♖h3 53 ♖h5 ♔c6 54 ♖h6+ ♔c7 55 h5 1-0

As Nimzowitsch put it, the restricted pawn centre made it possible to include manoeuvring in the opening phase of the game.

These games by Réti and Nimzowitsch convincingly demonstrate the advantages of the new theoretical outlook on the pawn-centre. In the early phase of the game they use pawns sparingly. This saves time for the development of pieces, which exercise their power on some of the central squares. As a rule, a fianchettoed bishop, whose diagonal cuts across the centre, and a knight focus their efforts on one of these squares. The control of the centre is often enhanced by the pin of an enemy piece that might otherwise exert influence on the relevant central square. The game is characterized by the clever use of bishops on the diagonals and the coordinated activity of knights. In Réti's game it is his fianchettoed light-squared bishop on the long diagonal, and in Nimzowitsch's game his dark-squared bishop and king's knight which focus their activity on e5. The other bishop pins the knight at c6, thereby achieving total domination of the e5-square. When the stage has been set, the pawns can be engaged to open the position and seize the initiative.

The consequence of such reasoning is visible in the pawn-formations. We move from the classical, symmetrical structures to new, restricted central set-ups, more flexible and increasingly distant from the traditional ideal.

The Post-War Soviets

In the 1940s and 1950s two young Soviet grandmasters and candidates for the crown, David Bronstein and Isaak Boleslavsky, evolved a new concept of the centre. They recommended that Black should cede the centre to White. Occupying it with pawns or controlling it with pieces takes time, and time should be invested differently. Black should finish his basic development as quickly as possible, allow White to build a full pawn-centre and then undermine that centre, trying to bring about a blockade. When the centre is blocked and its dynamic strength diminished, Black should rely on side-blows to seize the initiative on the wings. The King's Indian and the related systems were outlined.

It is a curiosity *sui generis* that in the atrocious years of the Second World War chess life in the Soviet Union did not die. On the contrary, many important events were organized and a tremendous amount of work was invested in chess theory. Once the war was over, the outside world had to face a new generation of remarkable players, playing some new, unknown ideas.

Szabo – Boleslavsky
Candidates tournament, Budapest 1950
King's Indian Defence

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 g6 3 ♘f3 ♗g7 4 d4 0-0 5 e4 d6 6 ♗e2 e5 7 d5

White blocks the centre. In principle, one could argue that he has done

so prematurely. Experience of later years suggested that it often pays to keep the tension in the centre until it becomes possible to release it under favourable circumstances. The release of tension makes it easier for Black to choose a plan.

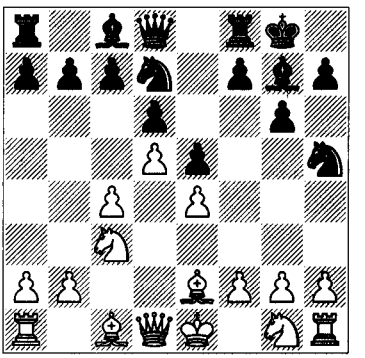
7...♘h5

When the centre is blocked, the action turns naturally to the wings. In the King's Indian Defence the kingside is Black's natural theatre of action. Boleslavsky has no second thoughts about it.

8 ♘g1?!

Later experience taught us that 8 g3 is advantageous here, stopping ...♘f4, although, with the king's bishop already on e2, the usual harmony of pawns and pieces is no longer there. However, Szabo could not have imagined his opponent's next step...

8...♘d7!? *(D)*



Bold and very much in harmony with the nature of the system. Black is ready to part with a pawn in order to carry out his counterplay at a quick pace. Many years later, in the third game of his world championship match against Spassky in 1972, Fischer played a related idea, albeit without a pawn sacrifice. 8...♘f4 9 ♗f3 (or 9 ♗f1 f5) 9...♘a6 is also possible, but Black was in an aggressive mood.

9 ♗xh5 gxh5 10 ♕xh5 ♘c5 11 ♘f3

Since 11 ♕e2 f5 12 f3 ♕h4+ hardly comes into consideration for White and since he does not worry about the possible reply 11...♘d3+ 12 ♔e2 ♘xc1+ 13 ♖axc1, White keeps his queen in enemy territory in order to slow down Black's counterplay.

11...f5 12 0-0

12 exf5 ♖xf5 and 12 ♗g5 ♕d7 both look bad for White. Besides, now 12...fxe4 can be met satisfactorily by 13 ♘g5 ♗f5 14 ♕e2, retaking the pawn and the important central e4-square with it.

12...f4

Black defines his theatre of action and his plan. The text-move announces clearly that he will rely on the bishop-pair and the semi-open g-file in the coming attack on the white king.

13 b4 ♘d7 14 ♗b2?!

White should prefer 14 ♘g5 ♘f6 15 ♕h4, when 15...♕e7 does not work due to 16 ♘xh7, while after 15...h6, 16 ♘e6 gives back the material to obtain relief from the mounting pressure.

14...♕e7 15 ♘g5?!

Now it is too late for this idea; White should play 15 ♘d2.

15...♘f6 16 ♕h4

After 16 ♕d1 ♘g4, 17 ♘e6 fails to 17...♗xe6 18 dxe6 ♕h4 19 h3 f3. Therefore, 17 ♘f3 would be forced,

opting for passive defence, but Szabo still hoped to make it more difficult for his opponent.

16...h6 17 ♘f3 ♕f7 18 ♘d2

The queen is in danger and it is high time to retreat.

18...♘g4

After 18...f3, 19 ♘xf3 is answered by 19...♘h5, trapping the queen, but White has the stronger 19 ♕g3 fxg2 20 ♕xg2, when it is not clear how to increase the pressure. Boleslavsky himself thought that 18...♔h7 was the best solution, and would cause White grave difficulties. However, during the game he probably felt quicker measures were necessary.

19 f3 ♘e3 20 ♖fc1 ♔h7 21 ♘d1 ♗f6 22 ♕f2 ♖g8

By temporarily giving up another pawn, Black manages to open up White's king position and brings his remaining forces into the attack.

23 ♘xe3 fxe3 24 ♕xe3 ♗g5 25 ♕e2 ♗xd2 26 ♕xd2 ♗h3 27 g3 ♕xf3 28 ♖c3

Played in order to protect the g3-pawn against sacrifice.

28...♕xe4

Black could avoid the exchange of queens by 28...♕h5, but the text-move leads to a won endgame, so there is no reason to avoid it.

29 c5 ♖g7 30 ♕c2 ♕xc2 31 ♖xc2 ♖f8 32 ♖f2 ♖gf7 33 ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 34 cxd6 cxd6

White's position is hopeless, as his forces are tied down by the constant threat of mate on f1.

35 ♖e1 ♖f3 36 ♗c1 ♖d3 37 ♗e3 a6 38 ♔f2 ♖xd5 39 ♖c1 ♔g6 40 ♖c7 ♖b5 41 ♖c4 ♗e6 42 ♖h4 h5 43 a4 ♖d5 44 h3 ♗d7 45 a5 ♖d3 0-1

White sealed 46 ♔e2 but resigned before resumption.

Zita – Bronstein

Prague – Moscow 1946

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♘f3 ♘bd7 7 0-0 e5 8 e4 c6

This game was played shortly after the end of the Second World War. Apart from a small number of 'insiders', few players were at all familiar with that large array of ideas which were to enrich what we call today the King's Indian Defence. David Bronstein and his colleagues played it with extraordinary energy and passion.

As we can see from the position in front of us, Bronstein understood the centre in utterly new terms. He allowed Zita to build his pawn-front on the fourth rank, well supported by knights and the fianchettoed bishop. It seemed all that White could dream of. However, there was more to it than it seemed at first glance.

9 b3 ♖e8 10 ♗b2?!

We know today that the fianchetto of the dark-squared bishop is not the best way to handle this variation.

10...exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♕b6

This move is one of the reasons why the b2-bishop is placed on the wrong square. We can say in general that whenever the bishop is developed at b2 in the King's Indian Defence, then the black queen should strive to

operate from b6. By exchanging on d4, Black, at the minor cost of a hardly assailable backward d6-pawn, exerts strong pressure on the dark-square diagonals h8-a1 and a7-g1.

12 ♕d2?!

The queen is clumsily placed here. Instead, c2 is often the best square for the white queen in the King's Indian, and 12 ♕c2 was possible owing to the fact that 12...♕xd4? would then lose to 13 ♘a4. Black would continue 12...♘c5 planning 13...a5 with pleasant play.

12...♘c5 13 ♖fe1 a5 14 ♖ab1 a4

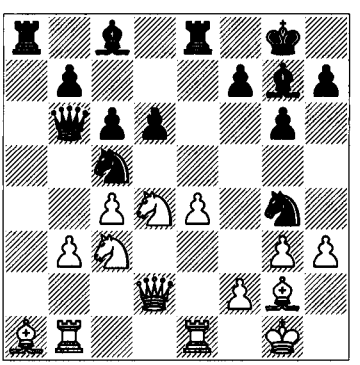
In perfect harmony with the position of the queen at b6, the pawn advances to open the a-file and to create a weakness at b3.

15 ♗a1 axb3 16 axb3 ♘g4!

All of a sudden Black's pressure on the diagonals increases to the point where we immediately sense that there is something dramatic in the air. However, Zita apparently remained confident and decided that he could now force his opponent's active knights to retreat.

17 h3 *(D)*

B



17...♖xa1! 18 ♖xa1 ♘xf2

Beautiful, but very logical too.

19 ♖e3

19 ♕xf2 fails to 19...♘d3, and 19 ♔xf2 to 19...♘xb3. White's position simply falls apart.

19...♘xh3+ 20 ♔h2 ♘f2 21 ♖f3 ♘cxe4 22 ♕f4 ♘g4+ 23 ♔h1 f5 24 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 25 ♕xd6 ♖xd4 26 ♕b8 ♖d8 27 ♖a8 ♗e5 28 ♕a7 ♕b4 29 ♕g1 ♕f8 30 ♗h3 ♕h6 0-1

The games we have just analysed remain the cornerstones of the King's Indian Defence and of the new concept of the centre in general. With Boleslavsky and Bronstein we cross a new frontier.

The movement away from the classical ideals and towards newer forms, more dynamic and more flexible, started with Nimzowitsch. This led to the rise of openings with asymmetrical pawn-formations, a tendency that grew stronger in the decades after the Second World War and found its full expression in the Benoni and numerous systems of the Sicilian Defence.

Together with these new concepts we recognize in the games of the Post-War generations one more fundamental element of modern chess – its dynamic character.

This trend was already clear in the 1930s, most notably in the games of Alexander Alekhine, who belonged to a school of thought that knew no prejudices. He came to the conclusion that while action is being taken on the board all the static values lose their significance, so that the assessment of

the position depends exclusively on the value of the action itself. The 1950s and 1960s saw continued investigations in the field of bold play based on mobile, aggressive pawn-structures. Players were prepared to seize the initiative by all possible means, including positional sacrifices and taking into account psychological considerations. This aggressive modern style launched to the chess summit Mikhail Tal, who possessed one of the keenest chess minds ever.

It was in 1959, during the second leg of the candidates tournament, played in Zagreb, that I saw Mikhail Tal for the first time. A large hall was packed to the door, while an even larger crowd was outside. As a young master candidate I was a demonstrator, lucky to be near the players and able to observe them. Tal was short and slim, but of commanding presence. He would consider his move with glassy, motionless eyes and only his penetrating glance, X-raying his opponent from time to time as if seeking some additional information about the position on the board, betrayed that he was alive and tense. When he seized the initiative, he would make his moves with a swift gesture, stand up, strange sparks in his eyes, and then he used to walk around his opponent. Of hooked nose and hawk-eyed, he reminded me of a bird of prey. He played chess as he looked. Fearless, of penetrating mind and stunningly quick calculation, Tal was ready to take every risk imaginable. He was an idol of the crowd, but also the leader of an audacious generation of great explorers whose domain consisted of dynamic new systems built on asymmetrical pawn-structures and whose weapon was the initiative. The following games were played in those unforgettable years.

Tal – Tolush

USSR Ch, Leningrad 1956
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♕b6

This opening line could hardly have come as a surprise to either player. Tolush, known as a reckless attacker, belonged to an older generation. Before Bondarevsky took over, he was a trainer to Boris Spassky, and he clearly influenced the style of the future champion. Tolush felt at home in the unexplored world of the Sicilian, but so did his opponent.

8 ♕d2 ♕xb2 9 ♖b1

This position was to interest lovers of the Sicilian for many years to come. Later, 9 ♘b3 became fashionable.

9...♕a3 10 e5?!

In this position we see a highly asymmetrical pawn-formation. That in itself is a sign of destabilization. What is more, the material balance has been disturbed by the pawn sacrifice. With his superior development, White strikes at once. Only in later years would White turn to the more cautious 10 f5.

10...dxe5

This is the first place where things could go wrong for Black. I remember my clubmate Fuderer losing to Keres in the Gothenburg Interzonal of 1955

after 10...♘fd7 11 f5! ♘xe5 12 fxe6 fxe6 13 ♗e2 ♘bc6 14 ♘xc6 bxc6 15 ♘e4, with a brutal assault in the air. 10...♘d5 looks quite naïve in view of 11 ♘xd5 exd5 12 ♖b3 ♕xa2 13 ♕c3 ♘d7 14 exd6 ♗xd6 15 ♘f5, but Tolush was not such an easy prey.

11 fxe5 ♘fd7 12 ♘e4

Black would be happy with 12 ♖b3 ♕a5 13 ♗e2 when Tolush had in mind 13...♘xe5, while 12 ♗e2 ♕a5 13 ♘b3 ♕c7 is just too tame to cause Black problems. In the 1960s, therefore, the battles were waged in the continuation 12 ♗c4 ♗b4 13 ♖b3 ♕a5 14 0-0 0-0, when Fischer excelled in defending Black's side. Although Black is behind in development, by pinning White's forces he keeps the initiative within reasonable bounds.

12...♕xa2?

Today it is easy to satisfy one's curiosity, and look up in any decent manual and read that 12...h6 was the correct move to play because, as we shall see, after 13 ♗h4 the bishop is positioned at the wrong place. However, sitting in the hall of the Soviet championship that far-away night of 1956 and relying only on your own head, there was no way to find the proper answer. It was certainly clear that 12...♘xe5? loses to 13 ♘b5, but otherwise the choice was not at all easy. On 12...♕a4, for instance, preparing 13...♘c6, White would strike by 13 ♗b5! axb5 14 0-0 with numerous threats hanging over Black.

13 ♖b3

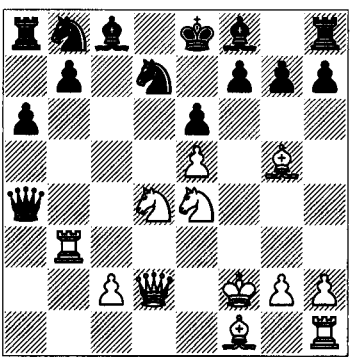
Now the queen is stranded deep in white territory.

13...♕a1+

The apparently logical 13...♘c6 would fail to 14 ♘xc6 bxc6 15 ♕c3 ♕a4 16 ♗c4 ♘xe5 17 0-0, when White has a critical mass of attacking forces.

14 ♔f2 ♕a4 *(D)*

If 14...♗c5, then after 15 ♘xc5 ♘xc5 16 ♗b5+ axb5 17 ♖xa1 ♘e4+ 18 ♔e3 ♘xd2 19 ♖xa8 Black also loses.



15 ♗b5!

Players had been wary of the bishop sacrifice on b5 ever since the Gothenburg Interzonal of 1955, when in an intricate Najdorf Sicilian position, Keres, Spassky and Geller all won their games against the Argentinean competitors thanks to this motif (see page 203). However, this time Tolush was caught again.

Apart from the text-move, analysts discovered another demolishing sacrifice: 15 ♘xe6 fxe6 16 ♘d6+ ♗xd6 17 ♕xd6 ♖f8+ 18 ♔g3 ♘f6 19 exf6 gxf6 20 ♗e2 ♘d7 21 ♖d1 ♖g8 22 ♕xe6+ ♔f8 23 h4, winning.

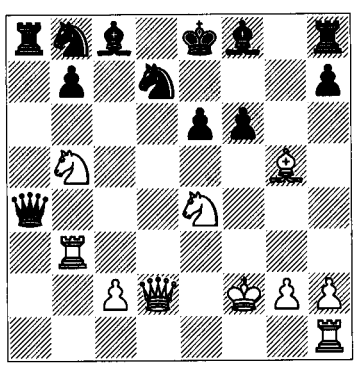
15...axb5 16 ♘xb5

White threatens mate. Here we come to the point where the significance of the above-mentioned 12...h6 comes in. If the moves 12...h6 13 ♗h4 had been included, then Black could continue here by 17...♗c5+ 18 ♘xc5 ♕xh4+ 19 g3 ♕d8; indeed, that is exactly what happened in the game Korchnoi-Tolush, USSR Ch, Riga 1958. White tried 20 ♕d6 but 20...♘xc5 21 ♘c7+ ♕xc7 22 ♕xc7 ♘ba6 left Black with a material advantage. Correct analysis has always been worth its weight in gold. This time, unfortunately, with the bishop at g5 such possibilities are out of Black's reach.

16...f6 17 exf6

White leaves the knight *en prise* with good reason: in case of 17...♕xe4 White planned 18 fxg7 ♗c5+ 19 ♔g3 ♕e5+ 20 ♔h3 ♕xg7 21 ♘c7+ ♔f7 22 ♖f1+, when attack overcomes defence.

17...gxf6 *(D)*



W

18 ♖e1

Bringing the last reserves into the attack.

18...♖a6

18...fxg5 would be punished by 19 ♘c7+, etc.

19 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 20 ♘xf6+ ♔f7 21 ♖f3 ♕h4+

Or 21...♕xb5 22 ♘d5+.

22 ♔f1

The better protected king celebrates victory. There is no way out for Black.

22...e5 23 ♕d5+ ♗e6 24 ♘d7+ ♔g6 25 ♘xe5+ ♔g7 26 ♖g3+ ♕xg3 27 ♕xb7+ ♘d7 28 hxg3 ♖b6 29 ♕c7 ♗c5 30 ♘xd7 ♗c4+ 31 ♖e2 1-0

Averbakh – Tal

USSR Ch, Riga 1958

Modern Benoni

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♗e2 ♗g7 8 ♘f3 0-0 9 0-0 ♖e8

The initial moves of the Modern Benoni give rise to positions in which the pawn-structure is split in two parts: White obtains a majority on the kingside, and Black on the queenside. In the further course of the game both sides will try to seize the initiative on the wing where they are superior: White, by preparing the breakthrough e5, and Black, by carrying out ...b5. The fact that we have these two plans being pursued in parallel is a source of considerable imbalance.

10 ♕c2

This move is rather rarely played. By defending the e4-pawn with his queen, White leaves the road open to his dark-squared bishop, bound for g5 or f4, to support the e5 breakthrough. The normal move is the slower but more logical 10 ♘d2. This move makes

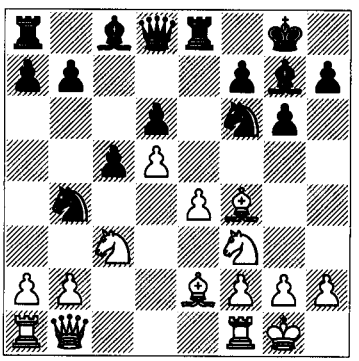
it possible for White to fortify his centre, if appropriate, by f3, freeing the knight to reach its destination at c4, whence it will help to carry out e5 in due course.

10...♘a6

The knight glances at b4, but would not be unhappy if the jump were denied to him by 11 a3, as the knight can then continue to c7. From there it would support the pawn advance on the wing as well as keep in check the central thrust by putting pressure on the d5-pawn.

11 ♗f4 ♘b4 12 ♕b1 *(D)*

B



After Black's 11th move, one could expect further energetic measures like 12...♘h5 13 ♗g5 f6 14 ♗e3 f5. However, Tal had in mind something more aggressive and risky and, therefore, more confusing to his opponent, an expert in endgames and a quiet positional player.

12...♘xe4!? 13 ♘xe4 ♗f5 14 ♘fd2 ♘xd5

Black has only two pawns for a piece, but the activity of his minor pieces and the disabling pin on e4 provide compensation. Black has seized the initiative in a complex position requiring long, precise analysis.

15 ♗xd6?

The fact that White fails to cope with his difficulties and immediately commits a serious error speaks for itself: this was not Averbakh's position and Tal's intuition had correctly guessed his Achilles' Heel. To be honest, it is quite easy to miss the right path in the jungle of possible lines:

a) It is easy to reject 15 ♗e3 due to 15...♘xe3 16 fxe3 d5 17 ♖xf5 dxe4, etc.

b) 15 ♗g5 helps White to get rid of the pin, but then 15...♕d7 16 ♗f3 (on 16 ♗d3, intending to meet 16...♘b4 with 17 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 17 ♗xf5, Black could respond 16...h6 17 ♗h4 ♕c6) 16...h6 17 ♗h4 ♘b4 18 a3 ♘c6 19 ♕d1 g5 keeps the pressure on.

c) However, 15 ♗g3 is a much more difficult nut to crack:

c1) During the game Tal considered 15...♕e7, when 16 ♗b5 ♗xe4 17 ♘xe4 ♕xe4 18 ♗xe8 ♕xe8 19 ♗xd6 ♕c6 20 ♗g3 c4 gives Black compensation for the exchange. However, there is also 16 ♗f3 ♖ad8 17 ♖e1 ♘b4 18 ♗xd6 ♕e6 19 a3 ♖xd6 20 axb4 ♖xd2 21 ♘xd2.

c2) Some time later Euwe pointed out another idea which seemed to refute 15 ♗g3. He suggested 15...♗h6 and indeed 16 f4 ♗g7, 16 ♗d3 ♘b4 or 16 ♕d3 ♘b4 17 ♕f3 (17 ♕xd6 is well met by 17...♗xe4, but not Euwe's recommendation 17...♗xd2, which loses to 18 ♘f6+ and 19 ♘xe8) 17...♘c2

keeps White in trouble. However, a couple of years later, in Peterson-Khodos, USSR 1964, White played 16 ♗b5 turning the tables again in his favour. The game continued 16...♗xd2 (16...♖e6 17 ♗c4 and 16...♖e7 17 ♗d3 are insufficient) 17 ♗xe8 ♕xe8 18 ♘xd6 ♗xb1 19 ♘xe8 and White won material.

c3) Obviously, if Black wants to make use of the pin, he must do something urgently and 15...♘b4 responds to that requirement by preventing 16 ♗d3 and threatening 16...d5. 16 a3 ♘c6 17 ♗d3 appears decisive, but after 17...c4 18 ♘xc4 (if 18 ♗c2 then 18...♘d4) 18...d5 19 ♘cd6 dxe4 20 ♘xe8 exd3 the fight goes on after, for instance, 21 ♘d6 ♘d4 or 21 ♘xg7 ♔xg7.

The text-move overburdens the e4-knight and leads to material loss.

15...♘f6 16 ♗f3

16 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 17 ♗d3 ♕xd6 18 ♗xf5 ♕xd2 and 16 ♗xc5 ♘xe4 17 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 show the white queen to be in a very unfortunate position. The choice was unappealing.

16...♘xe4 17 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 18 ♗xe4 ♕xd6

Black's useful material advantage and more active forces make his task pleasant.

19 ♕c2 ♖e7 20 ♗f3 ♖ae8 21 ♖ad1 ♗d4 22 a4 b6 23 b3 ♖e5 24 ♖d2 h5 25 ♖e2 ♖xe2 26 ♗xe2 h4 27 ♔h1

The exchange of a pair of rooks somewhat eased the pressure, but this looks bad. 27 ♕d3 or 27 ♗f3 was correct.

27...♕f4 28 g3

Both 28 ♗b5 and 28 ♗f3 fail to 28...♗e5 and so White must weaken his kingside.

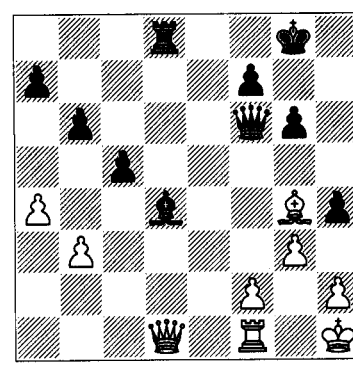
28...♕f6 29 ♕d1

If 29 ♔g2 then 29...♕c6+ provokes a further weakening by 30 f3 (30 ♔g1 loses to 30...h3, while 30 ♔h3 is met by 30...♔g7). 29 ♔g1 can also be met by 29...♕c6 30 ♗b5 ♕f3 31 ♕d3 ♖e3, although here Black has the simpler 29...hxg3 30 hxg3 ♕e5.

29...♖d8 30 ♗g4? *(D)*

White overlooks the following tactical solution. 30 ♕d3 was indispensable, though then 30...♖d5 keeps the pressure on (not, however, 30...♗xf2 in view of 31 ♖xf2).

B



30...♗xf2! 31 ♕e2 ♖d2! 32 ♕e8+ ♔g7 33 gxh4 ♕d4 34 ♗h3 ♕d3 35 ♗g2 ♖d1 0-1

36 ♕b5 ♕xb5 37 axb5 ♖xf1+ 38 ♗xf1 ♗xh4 is lost for White: Black's king will cross to the queenside and create a passed pawn as the final act of an exciting game.

Neither this nor the previous one were flawless games, but they are

characteristic of the period in terms of the pawn-structure, the aggressive mood and the psychological subtleties – a true testimony of the time!

The bright star of Mikhail Tal, taken here as a symbol of his generation, left an indelible mark on the decades to come. The exciting, imaginative chess he played attracted numerous followers among the small and the great. He imposed the frantic pace of investigation and defined the basic boundaries to be explored: the Benoni and various other Indian defences and above all the Sicilian. These openings were characterized by a dynamic, undefined centre and wing actions. The thorough analysis started with the Dragon, the Paulsen and the Richter-Rauzer, and soon spread to the Najdorf and Sozin. It intensified in the 1960s, with Fischer, Polugaevsky and Geller, among others, in the forefront. In later decades the Scheveningen and Pelikan came under particular scrutiny, now with the world champion himself, Garry Kasparov, in the lead. In the last decades of the 20th century the field of exploration broadened impressively and the depth of it even more so. The boundaries between opening and middlegame, invisible but felt clearly by an experienced player, show a tendency of disappearing to such an extent that many a time only at reaching the endgame does a player become aware that he is out of the opening. These two phases of the game tend to melt one into the other. The subtle relation of marching pawns on different wings, the undefined centre offering both sides numerous options, the variety of pawn advances and tactical blows make assessments increasingly difficult. Each position, as if evading general principles, must be assessed on its own more than ever.

Today, while the process is still in progress, considering the pawn-centre in the light of a century and a half of intense activity, we are prone to believe that these periods on which we have focused our attention laid the corner-stones of modern opening theory. The pawn-centre remains the key to its understanding.

2 The Open Centre

When discussing the epoch of the great romantic players Paul Morphy and Adolf Anderssen, we noticed that open games, gambits in particular, often characterized by the open centre, marked the whole period. It was common and typical for the central pawns to be exchanged in the early phase of the game. We could ascribe the phenomenon to the generally accepted view of the game of chess as an uncompromising encounter between two gentlemen, but we cannot overlook the influence of theoretical fashion, which always tends to cast games of chess in the same mould.

Open games were the order of the day, the King's Gambit reigning supreme among them. In order to seize the initiative and attack, a pawn sacrifice was seen as a promising investment. A gambit fuelled the attack, quickening the pace of development. Only decades of experience would later show that on its own a sacrifice is not enough.

If the position is closed, then slow manoeuvres may become necessary. The romantic period was too impatient for that. They wanted to unleash an attack and unleash it at once. To do so was a matter of honour and the chess master of the epoch launched it as soon as basic development was complete. He launched quick, sudden attacks, never stopping before risks of any kind. His aims, however, could not be realized without an open or at least semi-open centre. Only when the central squares were free of pawns, the major pieces on the files and the bishops on the diagonals would such an attack be launched. The major pieces penetrated via the open central files, the bishops' cross-fire swept the centre, while the unrestrained mobility of the minor pieces enhanced the dynamic options. The scene of action was often additionally nourished by opposite-side castling, easing the concentration of forces and their movement.

The short, typical games of the 19th century emphatically display all these traits. What they taught later generations was the method of play, based on accelerated development, easy manoeuvring in the open space, the strength of pieces acting in concentrated harmony and, above all, the value of time. All 20th century masters had to do was to play with the sagacity of their predecessors. The following selected games, ranging from Morphy to Kasparov, display full awareness of the possibilities offered by the open centre. It is not only the narrow territory of gambits, but a wide

range of openings, including the closed games, too, where the same method proves valid. But let us observe it in the practice of outstanding chess-players who lived and played in different periods of the last 150 years.

Morphy – Lichtenhein

New York 1857

King's Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♘f3 d5 4 exd5 ♗e7?!

Black is careful not to lose a tempo retaking the pawn with the queen, but 4...♘f6 better satisfies the need for economic development. 4...♗d6, defending the f4-pawn, is also more natural. However, Black has in mind 5...♗h4+, preventing White from castling.

5 ♗b5+ c6 6 dxc6 bxc6 7 ♗c4 ♗h4+

While White invests his time in development, Black wastes a tempo on a dubious check. The simple 8 ♔f1 would demonstrate its failure, but Morphy relies on a sacrificial alternative...

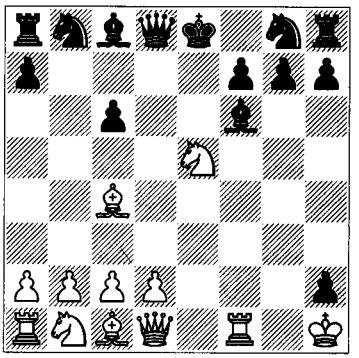
8 g3 fxg3

8...♕e7+ is well met by 9 ♕e2, but the cautious 8...♗f6 looks better.

9 0-0 gxh2+

White has accelerated his development by sacrificing two pawns. Note that the f-file is now open, which is a part of the general strategy initiated by 2 f4. This fact in itself should worry Black; the immediate retreat 9...♗f6 looks sounder.

10 ♔h1 ♗f6 11 ♘e5! *(D)*



This is possible owing not only to White's lead in development, but also to the general circumstances created by the open centre. Just a few moves into the game, the pawn-centre broke down, leaving an empty, inviting space to be used by active pieces.

11...♘h6

11...♗xe5 is met by 12 ♕h5, when 12...♕d4 can be parried with the quiet 13 d3.

12 d4 ♗xe5 13 ♕h5

White has already sacrificed two pawns, but to mobilize all his forces fully, further material sacrifice is necessary.

13...♕xd4 14 ♗xf7+ ♘xf7 15 ♕xf7+ ♔d8 16 ♗g5+

Note another typical point: in open positions one must not allow the opponent any breathing-space. 16 ♘c3 would be met by 16...♗g4, vacating c8 for the king and threatening 17...♗f3+ followed by mate.

16...♗f6 17 ♘c3 ♗d7?

Confused by a series of unexpected attacking moves, Black misses the hidden defensive resource – 17...♗xg5 18

♖ad1 ♗d2 19 ♖f2 ♗xc3 20 ♖xd4+ ♗xd4, obtaining enough material for the lost queen.

18 ♖xf6 ♔c7 19 ♗f4+ ♔b7 20 ♖d6 ♕c5 21 ♘e4 ♕xc2 22 ♖xd7+ ♘xd7 23 ♕xd7+ ♔a6 24 ♘d6 ♖hd8

24...♖ab8 loses obviously to 25 ♖c1.

25 ♕b7+ ♔a5 26 ♗d2+ ♕xd2 27 ♘c4+ ♔a4 28 b3# (1-0)

Morphy played this game blindfold.

Anderssen – Morphy

5th offhand game, Paris 1858
King's Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♘f3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 ♘e5

This line of the King's Gambit, named after Kieseritzky, has survived to the present day, unlike Allgaier's continuation 5 ♘g5, which was shown to be dubious as soon as Black adopted 5...h6 in reply. From e5 the knight not only creates threats, but it can also withdraw to d3 or retake the pawn at g4. It was a popular line in those days and it comes as no surprise that Anderssen played it in this encounter.

5...♘f6 6 ♘xg4?

The correct continuation is 6 d4 ♗g7 7 ♗c4, although Black has at his disposal 7...d5, closing the a2-g8 diagonal. I am less enthusiastic about 6 ♗c4, an alternative given by *ECO*. After 6...d5 7 exd5 ♗d6 8 d4 0-0 9 0-0 ♘h5 10 ♘xg4 ♕xh4 11 ♘h2 ♘g3!? Black's chances were better in the game de la Villa-Am.Rodriguez, Bayamo 1991.

6...d5?

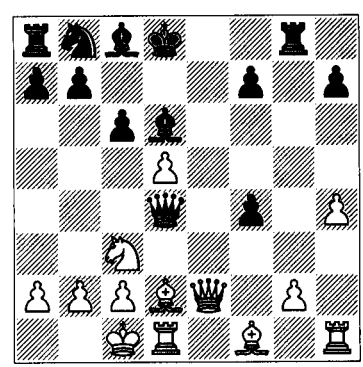
In turn, Black misses his chance to punish his opponent and plays what he considered an improvement. A couple of days earlier, in the second game of the same series of casual games, Anderssen, that time Black, continued 6...♘xe4 7 d3 ♘g3 8 ♗xf4 ♘xh1 entering the critical line. After 9 ♕e2+ ♕e7 10 ♘f6+ ♔d8 11 ♗xc7+ ♔xc7 12 ♘d5+ ♔d8 13 ♘xe7 ♗xe7 he went on to lose quickly, although this position was later shown to be very good for Black. In those days it was obviously not a habit of strong players to scrutinize their games after they were played.

7 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 8 ♕e2 ♗d6 9 ♘c3 c6 10 d4!

Played with superb understanding of gambit positions in which it is worth considering any sacrifice of material to gain time. If White missed this chance to accelerate his development, he would succumb to Black's active pieces.

10...♕xd4 11 ♗d2 ♖g8 12 exd5+ ♔d8 13 0-0-0! *(D)*

B



11...♖g8 was supposed to dissuade White from castling. However, he defies the threat at the cost of an additional sacrifice. He hopes for compensation in the form of his bishop-pair, more compact pawn-structure, and the tempo or two that he is going to win. Note that the idea is viable owing again to the fact that the pawn-centre has broken down, providing scope for tactical solutions.

13...♗g4 14 ♕e4 ♕xe4 15 ♘xe4 ♗xd1 16 ♘xd6 ♗h5 17 ♗xf4 cxd5 18 ♘xb7+ ♔e7 19 ♗b5!

For the third time in the game, White is ready to invest material in order to win time. The h1-rook joins the final attack, while the indispensable developing move of the black knight has been prevented.

19...♖xg2

The black king being exposed, 19...a6 would not help Black to bring the a8-rook into play. 20 ♖e1+ ♔f6 21 ♗e5+ ♔g6 22 ♗d3+ f5 23 ♗c3 ♘d7 24 ♘d6 is decisive.

20 ♖e1+ ♔f6 21 ♖e8 ♗g6 22 ♘d6

Anderssen keeps Black's queenside paralysed and sets a mating-net that Black can only escape at a decisive cost in material.

22...♘c6 23 ♖xa8 ♖xc2+ 24 ♔d1 ♘d4 25 ♖e8 ♗h5+ 26 ♔e1 ♘f3+ 27 ♔f1 ♖xb2 28 ♗e2 ♖xa2 29 ♗g5+ ♘xg5 30 hxg5+ ♔xg5 31 ♖e5+ ♔f6 32 ♖xh5 1-0

We have just examined two games played a century and a half ago, one of them blindfold and the other a casual game. Each of them is impressive on its own, but there is a common lesson on the peculiarities of the disintegrating centre and the most appropriate method of play in the circumstances. The geniuses of the romantic epoch left a message for posterity. Let us see how the 20th-century master absorbed the lesson and put it into practice. To begin with, we shall consider a couple of games played in the first few decades of the century.

Bogoljubow – Rubinstein

Match (game 9), Stockholm/Gothenburg 1920
Four Knights Opening

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗b5 ♘d4

We owe this opening line to Rubinstein's practice and analysis.

5 ♘xe5

On 5 ♗a4 or 5 ♗c4 Black replies 5...♗c5, developing quickly and seeking the initiative.

5...♘xe4?

Later experience confirmed that 5...♕e7 leads to balanced play. It is interesting that in an earlier game of the same match (game 3) Rubinstein did choose 5...♕e7, but after 6 f4 ♘xb5 7 ♘xb5 d6 8 ♘f3 ♕xe4+ 9 ♔f2 ♘g4+ 10 ♔g3 he timidly continued 10...♔d8 and later sank. He missed the hidden resource 10...♕g6 11 ♘xc7+ ♔d8 12 ♘h4 ♕h5 (threatening 13...g5) 13 h3 ♘f6 14 ♘xa8 ♕xh4+! 15 ♔xh4 ♘e4, when the white king is caught in a mating-net. Unaware of his error, Rubinstein enters the same variation and again takes the wrong road.

6 ♘xe4 ♘xb5 7 ♘xf7!

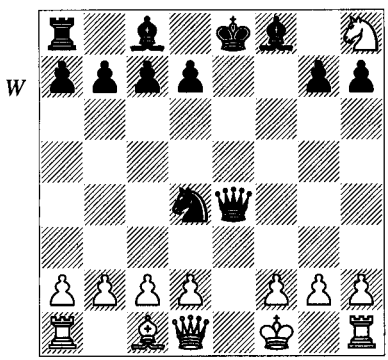
Now 7...♔xf7? would obviously lose to 8 ♕h5+, but what follows is far from clear and it took more than precise calculation to enter the following complications.

7...♕e7 8 ♘xh8 ♕xe4+ 9 ♔f1

Since the knight is trapped, the exchange of queens would not be satisfactory for White. However, it turns out that on f1 the white king is safer than his counterpart on e8. The fact that the centre is open favours White and he will be able to bring his forces into play at greater speed than Black.

9...♘d4 *(D)*

If Black tries to catch the knight with 9...g6 10 d3 ♕e5, then White wins by 11 ♕f3 ♕xh8 12 ♕e4+.



10 d3

Some sources give the moves as 10 h4 b5 11 d3 ♕f5.

10...♕f5 11 h4 b6 12 ♗g5

White develops with threats. This time it is 13 ♕h5+, which provokes Black's answer and earns an important tempo to bring in the queen's rook.

12...g6 13 ♕d2 ♗g7 14 ♖e1+ ♘e6

After 14...♔f8 15 h5 ♗xh8 16 hxg6 White attacks with superior forces.

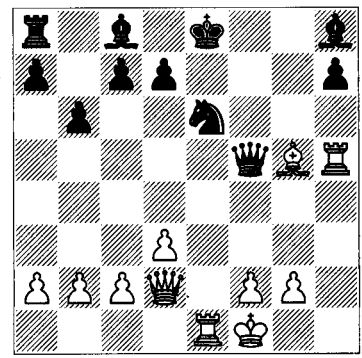
15 h5

When single moves form a part of a logical plan, sooner or later they will be justified. The advance of the h-pawn was the key to White's attack.

15...gxh5

On 15...♗xh8 White would continue 16 hxg6 ♕xg6 17 ♖h6 ♕f5 18 g4 with a strong initiative.

16 ♖xh5 ♗xh8 *(D)*



The knight has finally fallen, but for a good cause: while Black was investing precious time in its capture, White has succeeded in coordinating his active pieces. Owing to the open space in the centre, he is able to launch a final assault on the stranded king.

17 ♕b4!

The mate threat enables the white queen to move rapidly into an attacking position.

17...c5

17...♔f7 loses to 18 ♕e7+ ♔g8 19 ♖xe6 dxe6 20 ♗h6.

18 ♕h4 ♔f7 19 ♗d8 ♕g6 20 ♖h6 ♕xh6 21 ♕xh6 ♘xd8 22 ♕h5+ 1-0

A good lesson on the open centre and time, and their close relationship. After he sacrificed the knight at f7, Bogoljubow did not give his opponent a single moment of relief. The constant threats earned tempi, each of them invested in activating White's pieces to the maximum.

Nimzowitsch – Alapin

Riga 1913

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 exd5 ♘xd5?!

Black avoids the pin resulting after 4...exd5 5 ♗g5, although then 5...♗e7 6 ♗d3 ♘c6 7 ♘ge2 ♘b4 leads to balanced play. The text-move, on the contrary, leaves Black weaker in the centre.

5 ♘f3

5 ♘e4 transposes into another variation of the French. White, however, insists on quick development.

5...c5

In an earlier game between the same players, Nimzowitsch-Alapin, St Petersburg 1911, Alapin chose 5...♘xc3 6 bxc3 ♘d7 7 ♗d3 ♗e7 8 ♕e2 0-0, but was not satisfied with the course of the game. This time he decides to break up White's pawn-centre.

6 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 7 ♗e3

At a lucky moment chess can be a simple game indeed! Using an elementary continuation, White achieves a lead in development – the first step towards the goal.

7...cxd4 8 ♘xd4 a6

Black places the b5-square under control. He was afraid of 9 ♘b5, which could be quite unpleasant; for instance, 8...♘c6 9 ♘b5 ♕e5 (the exchange on d1 is obviously bad) 10 ♕d2 with an advantage for White.

9 ♗e2

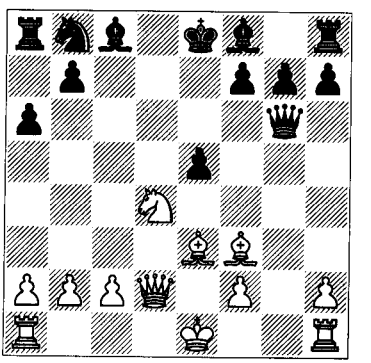
When a player has a particular type of advantage, he should seek radical methods to enhance it. Here White can boast of his lead in development and he accentuates it with this pawn sacrifice.

9...♕xg2?

Out of the frying pan into the fire!

10 ♗f3 ♕g6 11 ♕d2 e5 *(D)*

The moment when the less well developed side tries to free its game is in general critical. With his queenside development blocked and seeing that 11...♗e7 12 0-0-0 leaves him without a good answer (♖hg1 is threatened), Black attacks in the centre. If White retreats his knight then 12...♘c6 would get Black out of his predicament. However...



W

12 0-0-0!

White's lead in development provides strong justification for the piece sacrifice. To make matters even worse, Black has no real option but to accept the offering.

12...exd4

On 12...♗e7 there is 13 ♖hg1 ♕d6 14 ♕c3, when the consequences are equally brutal.

13 ♗xd4 ♘c6

Or 13...♗e7 14 ♖he1 ♕d6 15 ♕c3.

14 ♗f6!

Agreeable gambolling at the end of the game. Mate is in the air...

14...♕xf6 15 ♖he1+ ♗e7 16 ♗xc6+ ♔f8 17 ♕d8+ ♗xd8 18 ♖e8# (1-0)

A classic example on the theme of the lead in development, but also on the open centre with full emphasis on the coordinated activity of the bishops and major pieces. The threats down the open central file remind me strongly of another notorious debacle: 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♘f6 5 ♕d3 e5? 6 dxe5 ♕a5+? 7 ♗d2 ♕xe5 8 0-0-0! ♘xe4? 9 ♕d8+! ♔xd8 10 ♗g5++ ♔c7 11 ♗d8# (1-0) Réti-Tartakower, offhand game, Vienna 1910. I wonder whether Alapin was aware of Tartakower's fate.

Szabo – Vaitonis

Interzonal tournament, Saltsjöbaden 1952
Queen's Gambit

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 e6 3 d4 d5 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e3 ♘bd7 6 ♘f3 0-0 7 ♖c1

White keeps the tension in the centre and prevents the freeing move ...c5. The players are well aware that the development of the light-squared bishop at c8 is a major issue.

7...c6 8 ♗d3 dxc4 9 ♗xc4 ♘d5 10 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 11 ♘e4 ♘5f6

White would be happy to exchange queens and enter a complex endgame with rooks and minor pieces after 11...♕b4+ 12 ♕d2 ♕xd2+ 13 ♔xd2 ♖d8 14 ♖hd1 since it gives White a minimal but pleasant advantage due to his spatial advantage; e.g., 14...♘5f6 15 ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 16 ♗b3 ♔f8 17 ♔e2 ♔e7 18 ♘e5, preparing f3 and e4, as played in Alekhine-Capablanca, World Ch match (game 6), Buenos Aires 1927.

12 ♘g3 c5?!

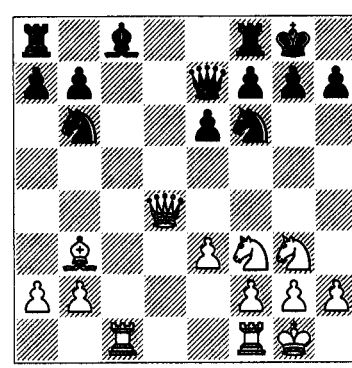
Black is reluctant to cede the f5-square to the g3-knight, but 12...e5 was a better choice, freeing the queen's bishop in a quick, natural manner.

13 0-0

13 e4, as proposed by Taimanov, is a good alternative.

13...cxd4 14 ♕xd4 ♘b6 15 ♗b3 *(D)*

B



15...♖d8?

Facing White's intention of playing ♖fd1, there seems nothing more logical than to oppose White on the open file. However, this move worsens Black's situation by chasing the white queen to a better place. At e5 it takes a dominant position: it supports the penetration of the rook to the seventh rank, it is ready to move to a5, and it also threatens to establish control of the d6-square thanks to the pin of the e6-pawn against the black queen. Black's basic problem remains unsolved. Thus 15...♗d7 was better, although 16 ♖c7 ♕d8 17 ♖fc1 is pleasant for White.

16 ♕e5

White, stronger in the centre and on the open files, now seizes the initiative.

16...♗d7

In view of the following continuation, 16...♕f8 came into consideration, when White would consider 17 ♘g5 (with 17...♗d7 18 ♘3e4 in mind) or 17 e4.

17 ♘f5 ♕f8 18 ♘d6

When the central files are opened, in most cases it is White who makes use of them. 14 ♕xd4 announced his predominance and the last move compels Black to defend passively.

18...♖ab8

18...♗c6 would fail to 19 ♘xf7.

19 ♘g5 ♘g4 20 ♕g3 ♘h6 21 ♘dxf7!

White's pressure has already become critical and this sacrifice, based on the powerful b3-bishop, demolishes the defence.

21...♘xf7 22 ♗xe6 ♗e8 23 ♖c7 ♖d7 24 ♖xd7 ♘xd7 25 ♖d1 ♕e7

Only little tricks remain...

26 ♖xd7 ♖d8 27 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 28 h3 h6 29 ♘xf7 ♗xf7 30 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 31 ♕f3+ ♔g8 32 ♕xb7 ♕a5 33 ♕b3+ ♔h8 34 ♔h2 1-0

When the centre disintegrates, beware of the open central files and the pressure exerted on them. Major threats come down the files.

Spassky – Fischer
Mar del Plata 1960
King's Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♘f3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 ♘e5 ♘f6 6 d4

When 6 ♘xg4? was refuted, White looked at the position soberly and decided that development remained his imperative. 6 ♗c4 is met by the strong 6...d5 and the text-move is the only viable alternative. It is crucial that White retakes on f4 and stabilizes the kingside, even though it costs him the e4-pawn.

6...d6

While Fischer did not avoid sharp lines, his preference was for a clear, straight road. 6...♗g7 7 ♗c4 d5 8 exd5 ♘h5 9 ♘c3 0-0 10 ♘e2 c5 is the complex alternative.

7 ♘d3 ♘xe4

In Fedorov-Ivanchuk, Wijk aan Zee 2001, Black preferred 7...♘c6 8 c3 ♘xe4 9 ♗xf4 d5 10 ♘d2 ♗d6 and achieved good play.

8 ♗xf4 ♗g7

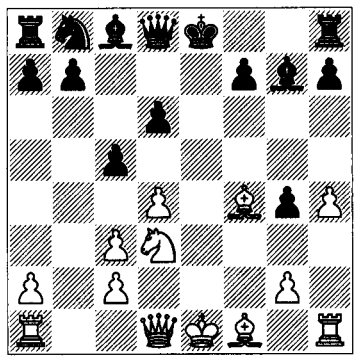
After 8...♕e7, 9 ♕e2 ♗g7 10 c3 h5 leads to equality, but White can try 9 ♗e2 ♗g7 10 ♘c3, when 10...♗xd4 11 ♘d5 leads Black into trouble, Henris-Goossens, Charleroi 1994.

9 ♘c3?!

9 c3 is generally accepted as the proper reaction to Black's fianchetto, although it yields little. 9...♕e7 10 ♕e2 h5 equalizes, but 9...0-0 10 ♘d2 ♖e8 and 9...♘d7 also deserve attention.

9...♘xc3 10 bxc3 c5 *(D)*

W



This move is in harmony with the fianchettoed g7-bishop, which would benefit from a further opening of its diagonal.

11 ♗e2

11 ♕e2+ can be met by 11...♗e6.

11...cxd4

Black cannot afford to delay this capture; after the alternative 11...h5 12 0-0 cxd4 White has the unpleasant 13 ♗g5 f6 (13...♕a5 is met by 14 ♘f4 f6 15 ♘xh5 ♖xh5 16 ♗xg4) 14 ♗c1, when he has managed to shut the long dark-square diagonal and has secured a cosy place for his knight at f4.

12 0-0 ♘c6

When the centre is breaking down and the position opens up, it is the developing moves that matter most. One cannot generally afford to lose time on other considerations, such as 12...dxc3 13 ♗xg4 ♗d4+ 14 ♘f2 or 12...♕xh4 13 g3.

13 ♗xg4 0-0 14 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 15 ♕g4 f5

15...♔h8 was a good alternative, not only to parry ♗h6, but also to vacate g8 for the rook. However, the text-move is more forceful and secures the d7-square for the queen, which makes possible ...♖ce8, when all the black forces will be fully activated.

16 ♕g3 dxc3 17 ♖ae1

This is the correct choice, and not only because 17 ♗xd6 ♖f6 does not work for White. The open file matters far more in the decisive struggle ahead.

17...♔h8

More consistent with 15...f5 would be 17...♕d7, planning 18...♖ce8 or if 18 ♗xd6 then 18...♖fe8. After the text-move, one feels that 15...f5 just weakened Black's defensive array.

18 ♔h1?!

A loss of time. Black's last move prepared 18...♖g8, which is quite unpleasant and could be prevented by 18 ♗xd6, although 18...♖f6 (but not 18...♖g8 in view of 19 ♘e5!) 19 ♗e5 ♘xe5 20 ♘xe5 is not a definite solution to White's problems. We shall see that White will have to part with his bishop in worsened circumstances.

18...♖g8 19 ♗xd6 ♗f8!

A fine move in a position where it was quite easy to miss the right road. After the apparently winning 19...♗d4 20 ♕h2 ♖g4 there is the hidden 21 ♗e5+! ♘xe5 (or 21...♔g8 22 ♖f4) 22 ♘xe5, when White is safe.

20 ♗e5+ ♘xe5 21 ♕xe5+ ♖g7!

The point: Black's bishop is destined for a more active diagonal, while the h4-pawn cannot be defended.

22 ♖xf5 ♕xh4+ 23 ♔g1 ♕g4?

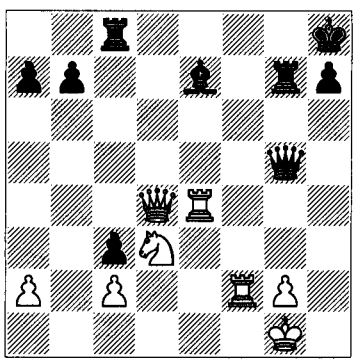
Black overrates his attacking prospects against White's king and underrates the pitfalls in an open position. After the game Spassky pointed out the strong 23...♕g3 24 ♕xg3 ♖xg3, when the imminent threat of 25...♖xd3 earns an important tempo.

24 ♖f2 ♗e7 25 ♖e4 ♕g5

25...♕d1+ 26 ♔h2 ♖c6 27 ♕b8+ ♖g8 28 ♕e5+ leads to a draw, but Black is reluctant to acquiesce to this outcome. In such situations what has happened earlier in the game usually influences the present course of events, with emotions prevailing over hard facts.

26 ♕d4! *(D)*

B



An impressive scene: White has a powerful mass of centralized pieces, whereas Black's pieces have lost their coordination and show signs of paralysis. His back rank is vulnerable, barring such moves as 26...♖d8 due to 27 ♕xa7 or 26...♗c5 27 ♘xc5 ♕xc5 28 ♖e8+.

Apart from that 27 ♘e5, 27 ♕xa7, 27 ♕d7 and 27 ♖e5 hang over Black's head and it is not surprising that Fischer misses the hidden 26...♗f8 when either 27 ♕xa7 or 27 ♘e5 is met by 27...♗c5 leading to a draw.

26...♖f8? 27 ♖e5 ♖d8

Unfortunately, 27...♗f6 fails to 28 ♕d6.

28 ♕e4 ♕h4 29 ♖f4 1-0

From the very beginning this was a fierce fight for the central squares and central files. Black was doing very well, but by seeking to attack the white king he allowed a massive centralization of white forces in the centre which had a paralysing effect on his counterchances. From that moment the path to defeat was short.

Tal – Lutikov

USSR Team Ch Semi-Final, Tallinn 1964

Queen's Pawn Counter-Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 d5 3 exd5 e4

In the 1960s Lutikov was a strong Soviet international master, belonging to the relatively small group of players who were allowed to play in the West. Although a player of sharp style, his provocative choice in the game against Tal in those days looked to me rather surprising. The gambit is so rare that I had to look up its English name.

4 ♕e2 f5

Black obviously needed to improve over 4...♕e7 5 ♘d4 ♕e5 (5...♘f6 6 ♘c3 ♕e5 is well met by 7 ♘f3 ♕e7 8

♘g5) 6 ♘b5 ♗d6 7 d4 ♕e7 8 c4, as played in Morphy-Mongredien, Paris 1859.

5 d3 ♘f6 6 dxe4 fxe4 7 ♘c3 ♗b4

Facing the loss of a pawn, Black hopes for quicker development in the following complications.

8 ♕b5+ c6 9 ♕xb4 exf3 10 ♗g5

When the centre is falling apart, it is the swift developing moves that matter.

10...cxd5 11 0-0-0

Castling long protects the king, and also brings the rook to the central file at the same time. That additional move is exceptionally valuable when the centre is in the process of disintegration.

11...♘c6 12 ♕a3

Although 12 ♗b5 is tempting, it favours Black after 12...♔f7. However, 12 ♕c5 is a natural alternative. In case of 12...♗e6 apart from 13 ♘b5 Black could not ignore 13 ♖e1 ♔f7 14 ♖xe6 ♔xe6 15 ♘xd5 either. I imagine Tal preferred the text-move because he wanted to avoid exchanges caused by 12...♕e7 (on c5 the queen is not defended, as it is on a3), but after 13 ♕xe7+ ♘xe7 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 16 ♖xd5 White is a healthy pawn up. For instance, after 16...♗e6 17 ♖d3 fxg2 18 ♗xg2 ♖b8 19 ♖e1 ♔f7 20 ♖de3 it's as bad as it looks for Black.

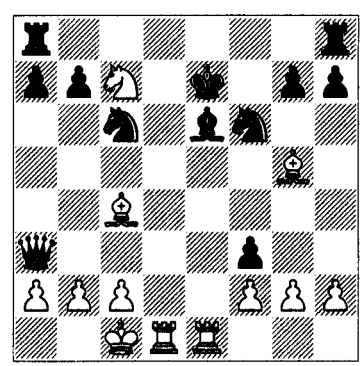
12...♗e6 13 ♗c4

Not the best, but quite consistent with the previous series of moves. The d5-pawn will fall and the oncoming attack on the central files looks crushing. White had this in mind since move 8. However, we shall see that 13 ♗c4 allows Black to put a long stubborn resistance. Of course, the prosaic 13 gxf3 was quite legitimate, but small gains could hardly satisfy Tal in this position. 13 ♘b5 is more attractive, with 13...♕e7 14 ♕xe7+ ♔xe7 15 ♘c7 or 13...♔f7 14 ♘d6+ ♔g6 15 gxf3 in mind. 13 ♖e1 is the aggressive alternative, when 13...♔f7 14 ♘b5 ♕d7 15 ♘d6+ ♔g6 runs into 16 gxf3 again, while 13...♕d7 14 ♘b5 ♘e4 15 ♗f4 keeps the enemy king under threat.

13...♕e7 14 ♘xd5 ♕xa3 15 ♘c7+ ♔e7 16 ♖he1!? *(D)*

When the centre is open, the strength of the major pieces on the central files can sometimes compensate for a significant material sacrifice. 16 ♗xe6 could be answered by 16...♕d6 17 ♖xd6 ♔xd6 18 ♗f4+ ♘e5, which is not necessarily winning for White.

B



16...♕c5?

Now 16...♕d6? is not as good due to 17 ♖xd6 ♔xd6 18 ♘xe6 fxg2 19 ♗f4+ ♔e7 (or 19...♔d7 20 ♘c5+) 20 ♘xg7+.

16...♕a5 is the critical line. 17 ♖xe6+ ♔f8 18 ♗f4 and now:

a) If 18...♘e8? then 19 ♖d7 ♕f5 (or 19...fxg2 20 ♖f6+) 20 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 21 ♗d6+, etc.

b) 18...♖d8? 19 ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 20 ♗d6+ ♔f7 21 ♖e5+ wins the black queen, which leads us to...

c) 18...b5 is an odd-looking defence whose idea is to close the fifth rank and so hide the queen from discovered attacks. Then 19 ♗b3 ♖d8 20 ♖xc6 (20 ♖xd8+? ♘xd8 21 ♗d6+ ♔f7 shows the point: the queen is guarded from the rook's attack by the b-pawn) 20...♖xd1+ 21 ♔xd1 ♔e7 22 gxf3 ♖d8+ 23 ♔e2 (Nunn) is liable to lead to a draw, while 19 ♗d6+ ♔f7 20 ♖e7++ ♔g6 21 ♗f7+ ♔h6 is completely unclear.

17 ♖xe6+ ♔f8 18 ♖xf6+ gxf6 19 ♘e6+ ♔e7 20 ♘xc5 fxg5 21 ♖d7+

As far as material goes, Black has come out of the fray in good condition, but his king is still sensitively exposed.

21...♔f6

21...♔e8 loses to 22 ♗f7+, while 21...♔f8 22 ♖f7+ ♔e8 23 ♖xf3 still leaves the king in dire straits.

22 ♖d6+ ♔e7

22...♔e5 loses to 23 ♖d5+, while after 22...♔f5 23 gxf3 the unexpected threat is 24 ♘d7.

23 ♖e6+ ♔d8 24 ♘xb7+ ♔c7 25 ♗d5 ♘b4

Or 25...fxg2 26 ♖xc6+ ♔xb7 27 ♖g6+ ♔c7 28 ♖xg5, etc.

26 ♗xf3 ♖ae8 27 ♘c5 ♘xa2+

A much criticized move. However, the proposed 27...h6 also loses after a somewhat longer process: 28 a3 ♖xe6 29 ♘xe6+ ♔d6 30 ♘d4 and now 30...♘d5 31 ♘b5+ ♔c5 32 ♘xa7 or 30...♔e5 31 ♘b5 a6 32 ♘c3.

28 ♔b1 ♖xe6

Or 28...♘b4 29 c3 ♖xe6 30 ♘xe6+ ♔d6 31 ♘xg5, etc.

29 ♘xe6+ ♔d7 30 ♘c5+ ♔d6 31 ♘d3 1-0

We again see the open centre and the major pieces in their natural habitat.

Boleslavsky – Teschner

USSR – East Germany 1960

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 dxe4 5 ♘xe4 ♗e7 6 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 7 c3 0-0 8 ♘f3 ♘d7 9 ♕c2

White's intentions become clear: he prepares to castle queenside in expectation of the imminent ...e5, which would free Black's game and open the position in the centre.

9...e5 10 0-0-0

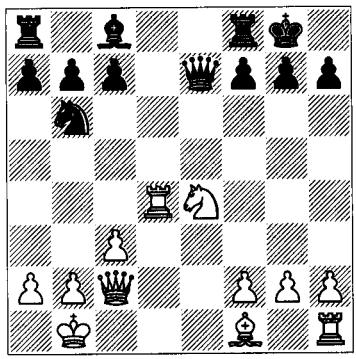
10 dxe5 ♘xe5 11 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 12 ♗d3 ♗g4 13 f3 ♗f5 leads to equality. Nor does 10 ♗d3 exd4 11 cxd4 pose any difficulties to Black. Spassky-Petrosian, World Ch match (game 1), Moscow 1966 continued 11...g6 12 h4 ♗g7 13 h5 ♘f6 with level play. Boleslavsky plays more consistently.

10...exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 12 ♖xd4 ♕e7 13 ♔b1 ♘b6?! *(D)*

The pawn-centre does not exist any more; the centre is open. We are at the critical stage of transition into the middlegame in which every move acquires special importance. Both sides have to bring their reserve into play

and much depends now on the position the pieces will take in the process. The further course of the game demonstrates that on b6 the knight remains somewhat out of play. The holy theory gives here 13...♖e8, while Boleslavsky, who generally preferred active continuations, suggested 13...♘e5.

W



14 ♘g3 ♗e6 15 ♗d3 h6 16 ♕e2

The first sign that Black's kingside is vulnerable.

16...c5 17 ♖e4 ♖fd8 18 ♗c2 ♖d5

Black feels more secure now that he controls the fifth rank, but some commentators thought it was time to think of how to transfer the b6-knight to the defence of kingside. 18...♕d6 was suggested, with the point that after 19 ♖d1, 19...♕c6 prepares 20...♘d5. However, 19 f4 looks stronger, since 19...♕d2 fails to 20 ♖xe6.

19 ♖e1 ♕d7

When the centre is open, the fourth and fifth ranks are often at the disposal of the rooks, which can easily reach attacking positions. 19...♖ad8 could be met by 20 ♖g4.

20 ♖f4 ♖e8

Again 21 ♕e4 was threatened and 20...♖d2 would have failed for the same reason: 21 ♕e4 g6 22 ♖f6 when the sword hangs over the point g6.

Having strengthened the point e6, Black can now meet 21 ♕e4 g6 22 ♖f6 with the strong 22...♖g5!, threatening 23...♕d8. Despite White's great piece activity, his attack cannot penetrate. Additional measures are necessary...

21 ♔c1!

The second rank must be protected before further steps are undertaken.

21...♕d8

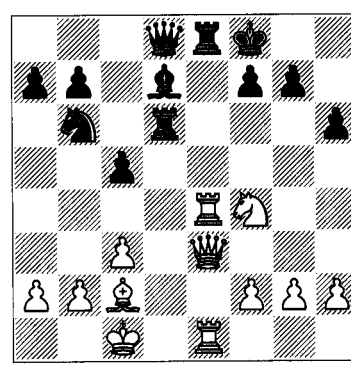
The queen retreats, vacating the d7-square for the bishop or the knight.

22 ♖e4 ♔f8 23 ♘h5 ♖d6 24 ♘f4 ♗d7?

This move loses by force. Suetin thought that 24...♘d5 was Black's last chance. It is true, but after 25 ♘xd5 ♖xd5 26 ♗a4 ♖e7 27 ♗b3 Black's position remains difficult.

25 ♕e3! *(D)*

B



This subtle, hidden move both reinforces the pressure on the e-file and

sets up various threats on the b1-h7 diagonal.

25...♗c6

25...♖xe4 loses material to 26 ♗xe4, when one of the pawns falls. Also, 25...♖c6 26 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 27 ♗e4 ♖c7 28 ♘g6+ ♔g8 29 ♕f4 leads to catastrophe for Black (29...♖c8 30 ♘e7+ or 29...♕d8 30 ♘e7+, etc.). Black, therefore, relied on the text-move, but in vain...

26 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 27 ♘g6+!

The final point.

27...fxg6 28 ♕f4+ ♖f6 29 ♖xe8+ ♗xe8 30 ♕b8 ♘d7 31 ♕xb7 ♖xf2 32 ♕d5 ♖f1+ 33 ♔d2 ♖f2+ 34 ♔d1 ♖f6 35 ♗a4 ♔e7 36 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 37 ♕xc5+ ♖d6+ 38 ♔c1 a6 39 ♕e5+ 1-0

This fine game demonstrates the broad possibilities offered by the open centre: pressure on the central files, threats on the diagonals, the use of the open central ranks, and a high level of coordination.

Alekhine – Flohr
Nottingham 1936
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♗d2 dxe4 5 ♘xe4?!

4 ♗d2 is normally followed by 5 ♕g4 vacating the first rank for 0-0-0. The sharp text-move also insists on quick development, but introduces too high a level of risk.

5...♕xd4 6 ♗d3 ♗xd2+

6...♕xb2 is worse due to the reply 7 c3 ♗e7 8 a4, which endangers Black's queen.

7 ♕xd2 ♕d8?

Was this move prompted by fear or the erroneous feeling that one pawn was enough? Having grabbed a pawn, Black concludes wrongly that it is time for retreat and consolidation. He should have accepted the challenge and taken the second pawn: after 7...♕xb2 8 ♖d1 ♘d7 White has a lead in development, but Black keeps his gains without weaknesses in the position.

8 0-0-0 ♕e7 9 ♘f3 ♘f6 10 ♖he1

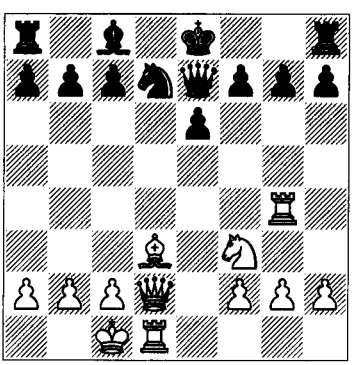
It is already apparent that the meagre captured pawn has cost Black too many tempi. White's strong lead in development, characterized by the massive concentration of forces on the open d-file and semi-open e-file, warn of Black's precarious king position.

10...♘xe4

Black's attempt to castle long by 10...♘c6 11 ♗b5 ♗d7 fails to 12 ♘xf6+ gxf6 13 ♕e3, keeping an eye on a7, and also threatening 14 ♗xc6 followed by 15 ♘d4. If Black prepares the exchange by 10...♘bd7, then 11 ♘g3 causes continued difficulties.

11 ♖xe4 ♘d7 12 ♖g4! *(D)*

B



Owing to the open centre, the rook moves freely on the fourth rank, provoking weaknesses and making sure Black's king will find no safe refuge.

12...f5

In case of 12...0-0 the standard sacrifice on h7 does not work, but 13 ♖e1! makes Black's life miserable: White threatens ♕h6 or ♗xh7+, and 13...f5 is punished by 14 ♖xe6. Black should resort to 12...g6, unattractive though it may be.

13 ♖f4 ♘f6 14 ♖e1 ♗d7?

Having chosen 12...f5, 14...g6 now seems indispensable. Of course, 15 ♘e5 or 15 h3 followed by g4, as suggested by Alekhine himself, convinces us that White's pressure is of a lasting nature. However, Flohr is reluctant to castle short and decides to give up the material gain in order to castle long and finally find some peace for his king.

15 ♖xf5 0-0-0 16 ♖a5 ♔b8 17 ♘e5 ♗e8 18 g3 ♘d5 19 ♖e4

White can take care of the backward e6-pawn later on. White is trying to build an attack on the opponent's king by making use of the open ranks.

19...♘b6 20 ♕e3 ♖d5 21 ♖a3 ♕c5

The exchange of queens will diminish the pressure on the black king, but Black's damaged pawn-structure, broken into three pawn-islands versus White's more compact formation, promises him difficulties in the endgame.

22 ♕xc5 ♖xc5 23 f4

Finally White increases the pressure on the e6-pawn, fixed in its passive position.

23...♖d5

23...♘d7 does not alleviate the situation in view of 24 ♘f3 ♘f8 25 ♘g5 ♗d7 26 ♗c4. If Black covers the critical g5-square by 23...h6 then 24 c4 a5 25 ♖d4 ♗c6 26 ♖c3 g5 27 ♗g6!, as given by the Soviet master Rovner, does not leave any breathing-space.

24 ♘f3 ♗d7 25 ♘g5 ♖e8 26 c4 ♖f5 27 ♖d4 ♖ff8 28 c5

The h7-pawn can wait a little. In the meantime it is important to prevent ...e5.

28...♘d5 29 ♗xh7

All the aims have been achieved: we enter the phase of realization.

29...♗c6 30 ♗g6 ♖e7 31 ♘f3 ♘f6 32 ♘e5 ♗d5 33 ♖e3 ♖h8 34 h4 c6 35 ♗c2 ♖d8 36 ♗b3 ♖c7 37 ♘f3 ♖e8 38 ♘e5 ♖ec8 39 ♗c4 ♔a8 40 b4 ♖b8 41 g4

Now that time-trouble is over, White takes decisive steps.

41...b6

White's domination on the d-file cannot be challenged, since 41...♗xc4 would be met by 42 ♘xc4, threatening ♘b6+ with mate.

42 g5 bxc5 43 bxc5 ♘d7 44 ♘xd7 ♖xd7 45 h5 ♖f7 *(D)*

45...♖db7 would be met by the simple 46 ♗b3.

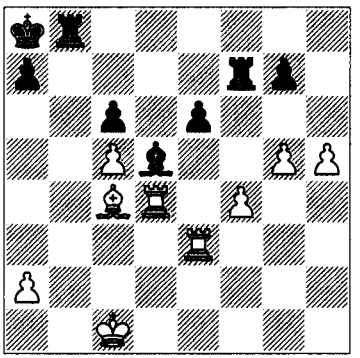
46 ♖xe6! ♗xe6 47 ♗xe6 ♖fb7 48 ♗b3

The kingside pawns are unstoppable.

48...♖h8

After 48...♖f8 49 ♔d2 ♖b5 50 ♖c4 ♖f5 51 ♔e3 the c5-pawn is taboo, because after the exchanges White will promote first.

B



49 h6 gxh6 50 g6 ♖g7

Or 50...♖f8 51 f5, etc.

51 f5 ♖f8 52 ♗c2 h5 53 ♖d6 ♖e7 54 f6 ♖e1+ 55 ♔d2 ♖f1 56 f7 h4 57 ♖d7 1-0

Alekhine's play is a memorable lesson on the contrast of initiative versus material. One pawn was insufficient compensation for the tempi invested in development and action. White castled queenside, while his opponent's king was stuck in the centre, uneasy about going to the kingside due to White's ready-made attacking chances. White quickly dominated the central files, a very common trait of positions characterized by the open centre.

The following game carries a similar message.

Kasparov – I. Zaitsev
Baku 1980
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♘f3 h6 7 ♗h4 b6 8 ♕c2

The first sign of things to come. White prepares to castle queenside, hoping that the pressure he will be able to exert on the d-file will thwart Black's counterplay against White's king. This idea has its risks, as we are about to see.

8...♗b7 9 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 0-0-0 c5

Black must not delay, as each passive step would enable White to launch his offensive first. 11...♘d7 12 h4 ♖c8 13 g4 would change the scene completely.

12 dxc5

White assesses that his kingside attack is less promising and decides to direct his play towards the apparently weakened d5-pawn – a consistent measure to which the previous moves pointed.

12...♘d7

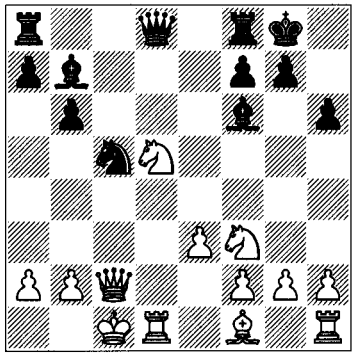
For a long time it was believed that 12...bxc5 13 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 14 ♗c4 ♘d7 15 ♖xd5 ♖b8 16 b3 ♕e7 guaranteed Black strong counterplay, but then 17 h4 ♘b6 18 ♖e5! ♕d6 (18...♗xe5 loses to 19 ♘g5) 19 ♖e4 (Nikitin) keeps the pawn and fortifies White's position. Dissatisfied with earlier practice, Black seeks chances by accelerating his development at the cost of the central pawn.

13 ♘xd5

13 c6 ♗xc6 14 ♘d4 ♗b7 does not create enough momentum for the wing attack (15 g4 is too slow in view of 15...♘e5 followed by 16...♘c6) and therefore would condemn White to passive defence.

13...♘xc5 *(D)*

So after 13 moves of the game we have a position characterized by the



open centre: a somewhat uncommon situation in the Queen's Gambit, but with quite common consequences. It is the better developed side, in this case Black, who seizes the initiative. His bishops are sweeping the centre while the white king is endangered on the open c-file and cannot easily find peace. 14 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 solves nothing and the apparently strong 14 ♕f5 is met by the hidden 14...♕c8!!, when 15 ♘xf6+ gxf6 still leaves White in a most uncomfortable situation.

14 ♗c4 b5!

Having seized the initiative, Zaitsev does not let up. The c-file is critical and time is the decisive factor.

15 ♘xf6+

15 ♗xb5 ♗xd5 16 ♗c4 ♕b6 (or 16...♗e4) would expose the white king even more, while 15 ♗b3 ♖c8 16 ♔b1 ♘xb3 17 ♕xb3 ♖c5 offers Black good compensation for the pawn.

15...♕xf6 16 ♗d5 ♖ac8 17 ♔b1 ♘a4 18 ♕e2 ♗xd5 19 ♖xd5 ♖c4

A correct assessment. 19...♕g6+ followed by ...♕xg2 would just lose the initiative. Black's primary aim is to activate his rooks and seize the c-file. The check from g6 may prove useful later on.

20 ♖d4 ♖fc8 21 ♖hd1 ♕g6+?

Black falters just a few steps away from victory. Having treated the typical open position in the centre in an exemplary manner, he misses a chance to conclude his play in a consistent way: 21...♖c2 22 ♕xc2 ♖xc2 23 ♔xc2 ♕g6+ 24 ♔d2 ♘xb2 would pick the fruit of good strategy.

22 ♕d3 ♕xg2 23 ♕f5 ♖f8?

When fortunes turn on the board, it takes composure and good nerves to get used to the change. 23...♕g6 was necessary.

24 ♖d8 ♖c7 25 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 26 ♘d4 ♖e7 27 ♘xb5

It is always possible to lose a game of chess: 27 ♕xb5?? would indeed lose to 27...♘c3+.

27...♖xe3 28 ♘d6 ♖f3 29 ♕c8+ ♔e7 30 ♕e8+ ♔f6 1-0

Ivanchuk – Akopian

World Team Ch, Lucerne 1997
Petroff Defence

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 d4 exd4 4 e5 ♘e4 5 ♕xd4 d5 6 exd6 ♘xd6

It has taken just six moves for the centre to become fully open.

7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 ♕f4 g6?!

For a long time this was considered the most solid answer to White's strategy. We shall see that this game raises new questions and new doubts.

9 ♗e3

In Ivanchuk-Kamsky, Linares 1994, Ivanchuk played the more timid 9

♗d2, when Black found a simple reply: 9...♕e7+ 10 ♗e2 ♗e6 11 0-0-0 ♗g7 12 ♖he1 0-0-0 with equality.

9...♗g7 10 0-0-0 0-0 11 h4

White does not fear the exchange on c3, which would not endanger the white king, but would visibly weaken the black king. White is able to exert pressure all over the board, stemming from his concentrated strength in the centre.

11...h6 12 ♗c5!

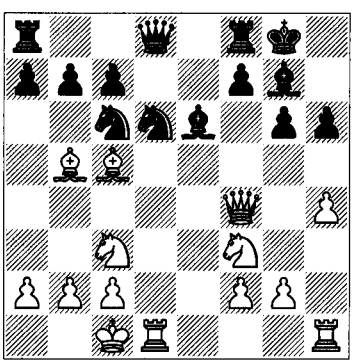
This move is much stronger than 12 ♗c4 ♗f5 13 ♗b3 ♖e8, which causes fewer worries for Black.

12...♗e6

The alternative was 12...♖e8 with 13 ♗b5 ♗d7 in mind, when 14 ♗xd6 cxd6 15 ♕xd6 is met by 15...♗xc3 16 ♕xd7 ♕b6. In case of 13 ♗c4 there is 13...♗e6 14 ♗xd6 cxd6 15 ♖xd6 ♕b8.

13 ♗b5 *(D)*

B



13...a6

Black seeks counterplay by offering a pawn in an attempt to remove the paralysing effect of White's bishop-pair. However, investing time to shatter one's own pawn-formation defies reason. It is true that 13...♘e7 14 ♗d4 is not pleasant either, as White has then taken maximum advantage of the open centre. However, there is always some alternative to examine. The improbable 13...♕f6 14 ♕xf6 ♗xf6 occurred to me. After 15 ♗xd6 cxd6 there can follow 16 ♖xd6 ♗xc3 followed by 17...♗xa2 or 16 ♘e4 ♗e7 17 ♘xd6 ♘a5, when Black relies on his bishop-pair, but White should also consider 15 ♗xc6 bxc6 (if 15...♗xc3 then 16 ♗d5) 16 ♗d4.

14 ♗xc6 bxc6 15 ♗d4!

A natural reaction: if the fianchettoed bishop is eliminated, the open b-file does not represent any real danger and if 15...f6 is provoked, then again the aim has been achieved.

In case of 15 ♗xd6 cxd6 16 ♖xd6 ♕b6 Black would get what he wanted.

15...f6 16 ♗c5 ♖f7 17 ♖he1 ♗d7 18 ♘d4 ♕c8 19 ♕g3

Before taking material, White tries to weaken his opponent's position. 19 ♗xd6 cxd6 gives Black more hope, as 20 h5 g5 21 ♕xd6 (Ivanchuk) 21...♗f8 enables his position to awaken. Also after 20 ♘e4 d5 21 ♘d6 ♕c7 22 ♕g3 ♗f8 23 ♘xf7 ♕xg3 24 fxg3 ♔xf7 Black would breathe a sigh of relief, although he has lost an exchange.

19...♘b7

With the queen on g3 and defended, 19...g5 could be met by 20 ♗xd6 cxd6 21 ♘e4, which explains this and the next few moves.

20 ♘a4

This secures the white king and thwarts any b-file counterplay.

20...g5 21 ♕b3 ♘a5 22 ♕d3 ♘b7 23 ♖e2

23 ♕g6 is also good, but the slower doubling of rooks on the open file demonstrates that White fully controls the board.

23...♖b8 24 ♖de1 ♘d6 25 ♕g6 ♕d8 26 g4 f5?

In bad positions, when maximum patience is needed, players are often tempted into a desperate try. 26...gxh4 was better.

27 gxf5 ♘xf5 28 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 29 ♕xc6 ♕d7

An opening of the position generally favours the more active side. Black is forced into a lost ending.

30 ♕xd7 ♖xd7 31 hxg5 hxg5 32 ♖e6

By chasing the pawn, White allows counterplay. 32 c3, planning 33 ♗a3 and 34 ♘c5 (Ivanchuk), looks simple and secure.

32...a5 33 ♖a6 ♖d5 34 ♖xa5 ♘d4 35 ♖a6 ♘f3 36 ♖e7 ♖bd8

This move loses without a fight. 36...♗xb2+ 37 ♘xb2 ♖xc5 was essential. Ivanchuk suggested 38 ♖g6+, meeting 38...♔f8 with 39 ♖gg7, but 38...♔h8 allows further resistance.

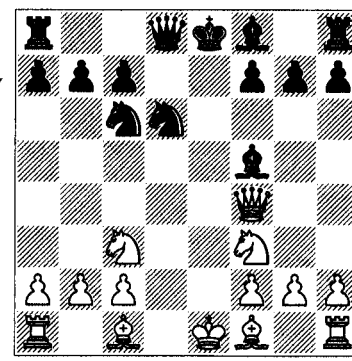
37 c3 ♖d1+ 38 ♔c2 ♖1d2+ 39 ♔b3 ♖b8+ 40 ♔a3 ♘e5 41 b3 1-0

Sax – Yusupov

European Clubs Cup, Rotterdam 1988
Petroff Defence

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 d4 exd4 4 e5 ♘e4 5 ♕xd4 d5 6 exd6 ♘xd6 7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 ♕f4 ♗f5 *(D)*

In Kasparov-Karpov, World Ch match (game 10), New York 1990, Black played another interesting idea: 8...♘f5 9 ♗b5 ♗d6 10 ♕e4+ ♕e7. On f4 the queen is very actively posted and Black's idea of dislodging it from its privileged position has a great deal of logic.



9 ♗b5 ♗e7?!

Originally 8...♗f5 was based on the continuation 9...♕e7+, when 10 ♗e3 ♘xb5 11 ♘xb5 ♕b4+ 12 ♕xb4 ♗xb4+ 13 c3 ♗d6 (not 13...♗a5? 14 b4) 14 ♘xd6+ cxd6 15 0-0-0 ♗e6 gives White only a minimal advantage (certainly less than *ECO* suggests). I recall that during the traditional USSR-Yugoslavia match in Sochi 1968, Matulović prepared the line against Kholmov, in those years a strong advocate of the Petroff Defence. However, on 9...♕e7+ Paul Keres recommended later 10 ♔f1 ♗e4 11 ♗a4, which seems to me critical. Let us note in passing that 9...♗d7 does not look quite consistent; White would continue 10 ♗d3.

10 ♗xc6+!

This starts a series of more or less forced moves. 10 ♘d4 ♗d7 offers White less.

10...bxc6 11 ♘e5 0-0

11...♗d7 is bad due to 12 ♕f3, while grabbing the pawn by 11...♗xc2 looks dubious in view of the natural developing move 12 ♗e3.

12 ♘xc6 ♕e8 13 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7+ 14 ♗e3 ♗xc2 15 ♖c1

White had this position in mind at move 10. He has managed to damage his opponent's pawn-structure and if he manages to castle, there will be no doubt that his prospects are better.

15...♗d3

15...♗e4 16 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 17 0-0 is not appealing for Black, so his attempt to look for tactical chances looks natural.

16 ♘d5 ♕d8 17 ♕d4 ♗a6?

This move happens to be inferior to 17...♗g6, but even then after 18 0-0 ♘f5 19 ♕c5 ♘xe3 20 ♘xe3 the weakness of Black's pawn-formation is irreparable.

18 ♘xc7 ♖b8

Although 18...♖c8 looks perilous for White, some little tactics solve all his temporary difficulties: 19 ♘xa6! ♕a5+ 20 ♘b4 ♘f5 21 ♖c5!. By controlling the b4-square, Black hopes to avoid this problem.

19 ♖c6?

Duly impressed, White chooses the wrong path. He still had 19 ♘xa6! ♕a5+ 20 ♘b4 ♖xb4 (or 20...♘f5 21 ♖c5) 21 ♕xd6 ♖d4+ 22 b4, winning.

19...♗b7 20 ♖xd6 ♕xc7 21 0-0 ♖bd8

Setting a subtle trap.

22 ♖d1

After 22 ♖xd8, 22...♖xd8? loses to 23 ♕xa7 ♖a8 24 ♕c5 ♕xc5 25 ♗xc5 ♖xa2 26 ♗a3, but after 22...♕xd8 23 ♕xa7 ♕d5 24 f3 ♖a8 followed by 25...♖xa2 Black is still alive. The opposite-coloured bishops remain Black's main hope.

22...♖xd6 23 ♕xd6 ♕xd6 24 ♖xd6 a6 25 f3 f6 26 ♖b6?!

This is a useless move, as the rook stands well at d6. White should transfer his bishop to c3 and improve the position of his king.

26...♖f7 27 ♗f4?!

Putting the bishop on f4 is a part of an inferior plan, as mentioned above.

27...♖d7 28 ♔f2 ♔f7 29 b4 ♗c8 30 ♖c6 ♗b7 31 ♖b6 ♗c8 32 ♔e3?!

This is another inferior decision, from which Black benefits by exchanging rooks. There now follows a typically drawish opposite-coloured bishop ending. 32 a3 would have kept the game alive.

32...♖b7 33 ♖xb7+ ♗xb7 34 ♔d4 ♗c6 35 ♔c5 ♗b5 36 ♔b6 ♔e6 37 a4 ♗f1 38 g3 ♗e2 39 ♗b8 ♔d7 40 f4 f5 41 ♗e5 g6 42 ♔b7 ♔e6 43 ♔c7 ♗d3 44 ♔d8 ♔f7 45 ♗c3 ♗e2 46 b5 axb5 47 a5 b4 48 ♗xb4 ♗f1 49 ♔d7 ♗e2 50 ♔d6 ♗f1 51 ♔d7 ½-½

The variation of the Petroff Defence played in these two games, marked by the open central files, leads to lively play. Abundant motifs in various move-orders have led to new ideas. However, the opposite-side castling, the dominant white queen and the large freedom of movement offered to

his minor pieces all speak in White's favour and it is not surprising that in recent years Black has virtually abandoned this variation in favour of the more solid 3...♘xe4.

Tal – Smyslov
Candidates tournament, Bled 1959
Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 2 d3 d5 3 ♘d2 e5

An ambitious, presumptuous move, but before this game was played it was looked upon as an active engagement in the centre.

4 ♘gf3 ♘d7 5 d4!

When we start playing chess we are taught peremptorily not to move the same piece twice in the early phase of the game. Tal did not think twice about breaking the rule. It is the privilege of the great players to see the game of chess in terms of exceptions rather than rules. White sees that the exchanges lead to a strong centralization of his forces, at the same time accelerating his development.

5...dxe4

5...exd4 6 exd5 cxd5 7 ♘xd4 transposes into a variation of the Tarrasch French in which d7 is not an ideal place for the black knight.

6 ♘xe4 exd4 7 ♕xd4

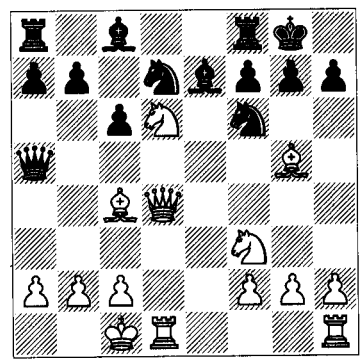
The pawn-centre has been wiped out and the priority becomes to develop quickly and occupy active posts. In the above game Ivanchuk-Akopian, White's queen was excellently placed at f4. Here, undisturbed and powerful, it occupies the very centre of the board. Besides, it is the first step towards queenside castling, the most desirable short-term aim under the circumstances.

7...♘gf6 8 ♗g5 ♗e7 9 0-0-0

9 ♘d6+ objectively does not yield as much as Tal expected playing White. The text-move is a part of the general plan started with 5 d4.

9...0-0 10 ♘d6 ♕a5 11 ♗c4 *(D)*

B



Although this move provokes a dangerous reaction from Black on the queenside which needs careful examination, Tal had no qualms about playing it. Mobilizing all his forces, he finishes his development in a consistent, convincing way. Naturally, when playing 11 ♗c4 he had to see far in advance.

11...b5

We enter the middlegame and the struggle becomes ever more complicated; the possibilities broaden all of a sudden, requiring long, precise calculation. The first question occurring to the commentator is what happens after 11...♗xd6 12 ♕xd6 ♘e4 and it is not that difficult to find the answer: 13

♕e7 ♘xf2 14 ♖xd7 ♗xd7 15 ♖f1 and White wins material. Another obvious attempt by Black to free himself is 11...♘b6 12 ♗b3 c5 (12...♘bd5 is easier to decide about: 13 ♘xc8 ♖axc8 14 ♖he1), but 13 ♕e5 puts Black's counterplay under control; for instance, 13...♗xd6 14 ♖xd6 and 14...♖e8 is not available due to 15 ♗xf6, etc.

However, the text-move is a tough nut to crack. Since 12 ♗b3 does not work, it takes extraordinary measures to cope with the problems.

12 ♗d2!

White regroups his forces. He will need the g5-square for other pieces.

12...♕a6

Tal demonstrated that on 12...♕c7 White can seize the initiative by 13 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 14 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 15 ♘g5+ ♔g8 16 ♖he1 ♗f8 17 ♗f4 ♕b7 18 ♗d6, at the same time preserving material equality. Some commentators believed that Black could equalize by forcing the exchange of queens with 12...♕a4. However, the continuation 13 ♘xc8 ♖fxc8 (or 13...♖axc8) 14 ♗b3 ♕xd4 15 ♘xd4 does not confirm it: Black's queenside pawns are less dangerous than it may seem at first glance, while the better coordination of the centralized white pieces guarantees him active play. By keeping an eye on a2, Black has chosen the critical line.

13 ♘f5 ♗d8

Again the best defensive move. Smyslov decides correctly that the point f6 is critical and must be defended. 13...♗c5? fails exactly because the f6-knight is not well enough supported. 14 ♕h4 bxc4 15 ♗c3 (but not 15 ♘xg7? because of 15...♗xf2) 15...♕xa2 16 ♖xd7 ♗xd7? 17 ♘h6+ ♔h8 18 ♕xf6! demonstrates the point.

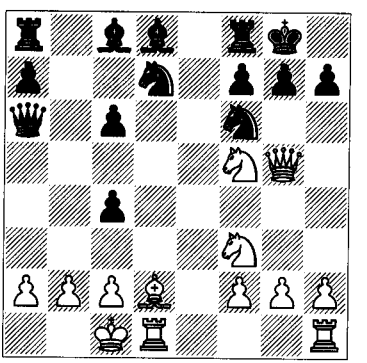
14 ♕h4 bxc4

In case of 14...♘e5?, trying to strengthen the defence of the black king, White replies 15 ♘h6+! gxh6. During the game Tal then had in mind 16 ♗xh6, when 16...♘g6 loses to 17 ♖xd8!. However, given that Black has a stronger reply, 16...♘d5, White would do better to choose 16 ♘xe5!, which does win.

15 ♕g5 *(D)*

V.Vuković, looking at Tal's violent attack with great scepticism and trying to find a hole in it, pointed out that 15 ♗c3 ♕xa2 16 ♘xg7 is refuted by the hidden 16...♘c5!.

B



Comparing with the position after 12 ♗d2, we witness that a dramatic change has taken place. White is now a piece down, but his forces have moved into attacking positions. The major threat hanging over Smyslov's head is on the long dark-square diagonal.

15...♘h5

Giving back material to appease the appetite of the attacker is an old defensive formula, but 15...♘e8 16 ♕xd8 ♘ef6 finds a response in the simple 17 ♕a5, forcing a better endgame. The main alternative was 15...g6 16 ♘h6+ ♔g7 17 ♗c3, and now:

a) 17...♕xa2? has been the subject of considerable analysis over four decades, but appears to lose by force:

a1) After Tal's 18 ♖he1, Nunn gave the sample line 18...♕a1+ 19 ♔d2 ♕a6 20 ♘h4 c5 21 ♘4f5+ ♔h8 22 ♘xf7+ ♖xf7 23 ♖e8+ ♘f8 24 ♕h6 ♖d7+ 25 ♔e1 ♕e6+ 26 ♖xe6 ♖xd1+ 27 ♔xd1 ♘xe6 28 ♘d6 with advantage to White.

a2) 18 ♘g4! h5 and then:

a21) 19 ♕h6+? ♔g8 20 ♘g5 hxg4 21 ♖xd7? ♗a5 22 ♘e6 ♕a1+ 23 ♔d2 ♗xc3+! is winning for Black; e.g., 24 bxc3 ♘e4+ 25 ♔e2 ♘xc3+, etc.

a22) In *ChessBase Magazine 81*, Kasparov gave the impressive line 19 ♖xd7! hxg4 20 ♖xd8! ♕a1+ 21 ♔d2 ♖xd8+ 22 ♔e3 ♖e8+ 23 ♔f4, when White wins; e.g., 23...♕xh1 24 ♗xf6+ ♔g8 25 ♕h4 forces mate.

b) 17...♕b5! was Kasparov's recommendation. His main line was then 18 h4 ♖e8 19 ♘g4 ♕f5! 20 ♘h6!, leading to a repetition.

16 ♘h6+ ♔h8 17 ♕xh5 ♕xa2

17...♘f6? is unsatisfactory in view of 18 ♕c5 ♘d7 19 ♕d6.

17...♗f6!? is the only alternative:

a) Tal had in mind 18 ♗c3(?) ♗xc3 19 ♘g5, but this can be refuted by 19...♗xb2+! 20 ♔xb2 gxh6 21 ♕xh6 ♕b5+ followed by 22...♕f5.

b) 18 ♘g5? ♗xg5 19 ♕xg5 f6 20 ♕h5 ♕xa2 21 ♗c3 ♘e5! is good for Black.

c) 18 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 19 ♘7g5 (19 ♘3g5? fails to 19...♗xg5 20 ♘xg5 ♘f6) 19...h6 leads to approximate equality.

18 ♗c3 ♘f6?

Smyslov collapses under the pressure. Instead, 18...♗f6 was essential. Then 19 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 20 ♘3g5? (20 ♘7g5 saves White according to Kasparov's analysis) 20...♕a1+ 21 ♔d2 ♗xc3+ 22 bxc3 ♘f6, a line indicated by Burgess in *Chess Highlights of the 20th Century*, is very good for Black according to Kasparov, so White should acquiesce to a draw by 19 ♘g5 ♗xg5+ 20 ♕xg5 f6 21 ♕g3 (21 ♕h5? transposes to note 'b' to Black's 17th move) 21...♘e5 22 ♗xe5 fxe5 23 ♘f7+.

19 ♕xf7! ♕a1+ 20 ♔d2 ♖xf7 21 ♘xf7+ ♔g8 22 ♖xa1 ♔xf7 23 ♘e5+ ♔e6 24 ♘xc6 ♘e4+ 25 ♔e3 ♗b6+ 26 ♗d4 1-0

This dramatic game held audiences breathless in Bled and several Yugoslav cities in which it was commentated upon that night. Apart from the opposite-side castling and White's spatial advantage, features that regularly accompany the open centre, the game is characterized by the powerful activity of the white bishops. The light-squared one drew the attention of Black's counterplay and its sacrifice paved the way for the mighty dark-squared bishop. Its long-range power was decisive in breaking Black's resistance. With the centre wide open the bishops acquire unusual power.

Keres – Johansson
Stockholm 1967
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘c6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♕c7 6 g3 a6

Here this move is necessary. 6...♘f6 is dubious in view of the unpleasant 7 ♗f4.

7 ♗g2 ♘f6 8 0-0 ♗e7?!

Black enters a line of the g3 Scheveningen using a move-order which one could hardly recommend. He would have fewer difficulties if instead of ...♘f6 he had played ...d6, making possible ...♗d7. 8...♘xd4 9 ♕xd4 ♗c5 seems to me a better choice, although 10 ♗f4 d6 11 ♕d2 remains favourable for White.

9 ♖e1 d6

In case of 9...0-0 White seizes space by 10 ♘xc6 dxc6 11 e5, preventing natural development and counterplay for his opponent, who then faces the Sicilian conundrum without good answers.

10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 e5! dxe5 12 ♖xe5 *(D)*

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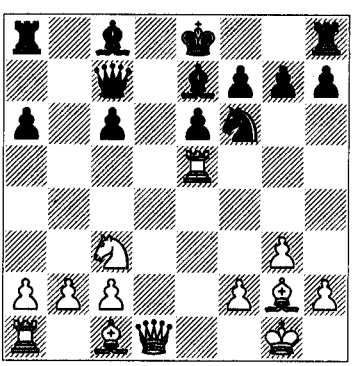

12...0-0

The energetic pawn-thrust 11 e5 opened the centre to the sweeping power of White's bishops. The fianchettoed bishop is in its place already, while the dark-squared bishop is ready to move to f4, increasing the pressure along the open diagonals. It is not easy to oppose that pressure. 12...♗d6 is met by 13 ♕f3 ♗d7 14 ♖g5, while 12...♗b7 does not prevent 13 ♗f4, played in Browne-Langeweg, Amsterdam 1972, which continued 13...♗d6 14 ♖xe6+ fxe6 15 ♗xd6 with a strong initiative for the slight material sacrifice. In several games, therefore, Black relied on 12...♘d5 13 ♘xd5 cxd5, trying to block the long diagonal. However, 14 ♗f4 ♕a7 15 c4 kept the initiative in Kozlov-Anikaev, Yaroslavl 1990.

13 ♗f4 ♕b7

13...♗d6 fails to 14 ♖xe6! (Keres).

14 ♘a4

Keres-Vasiukov, USSR Ch, Tallinn 1965 continued 14 ♖e3 (defending the b2-pawn indirectly) 14...♖d8 15 ♕e2 ♗d7 16 ♗e5. The text-move was intended as an improvement.

14...♖d8

After 14...♘d5 15 ♗d2 ♗f6, Al.Ivanov-Ashley, Philadelphia 1989 continued 16 ♖e2 a5 17 ♖b1 ♖d8 18 ♕e1 ♕a7 19 c4 with an advantage for White.

15 ♗d2 ♖b8?

More logical is 15...♕c7 followed by 16...a5.

16 ♕e1 ♗d6

The rook will be well placed on e3, so chasing it there can hardly be justified. 16...♘d5 is better.

17 ♖e3 ♕b5 18 b3 ♗c7 19 ♖c3!

A strong reaction to Black's attempt to escape his predicament.

19...♗d7

19...♗a5 20 ♖c5 ♗xd2 21 ♖xb5 cxb5 runs into 22 ♖d1!, while 19...♗e5 20 ♗xc6 ♗xc3 21 ♗xb5 ♗xa1 fails to 22 ♗a5. So Black is pushed into passive defence without realistic chances to find an exit.

20 ♘c5 ♘d5 21 a4 ♕b6 22 a5 ♕a7 23 ♘xd7 ♖xd7 24 ♖xc6 ♖bd8 25 ♗g5 ♖b8 26 ♖xe6 1-0

White's bishop-pair did a superb job. Keres's lesson is straightforward: when you have a pair of bishops, try to prise the centre open, because open spaces are beneficial to their activity. A couple of short, amusing games which follow bring the same message...

Winawer – Steinitz

Nuremberg 1896

Centre Game

1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 ♕xd4 ♘c6 4 ♕e3

Some elementary chess principles speak against this old continuation, which exposes the queen in the centre. However, even in our time we come across players who try to improve what cannot be basically improved.

4...♘f6 5 ♘c3

5 e5 ♘g4 6 ♕e4 d5 7 exd6+ ♗e6 accelerates Black's development to an uncomfortable level for White.

5...♗b4 6 ♗d2 0-0 7 0-0-0 ♖e8

We have witnessed the beneficial effects of early queenside castling in several games, but different circumstances lead to different consequences. In our game the pressure on the e4-pawn is strong and it can be enhanced by ...d5.

8 ♗c4

Playing against Mieses in Berlin 1913, Capablanca faced 8 ♕g3 and replied 8...♘xe4 9 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 10 ♗f4 ♕f6 11 ♘h3 (but not 11 ♗xc7 d6 12 ♗xd6? ♕h6+) 11...d6 12 ♗d3 ♘d4 with a fine game, but later 8...♖xe4 was found as the definitive answer. Winawer instead plays a logical developing move, preventing the central counterblow.

8...♗xc3

ECO gives also 8...♘a5 9 ♗e2 (9 ♗d3 d5 cannot please White) 9...d5, and continues 10 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 11 ♕d3 ♕f6!, missing the dangerous 10 ♕g3. In Romero-Karpov, Madrid 1992, Karpov, inclined by nature to simpler solutions, chose the sound 8...d6 9 f3 ♘a5 10 ♗b3 ♘xb3+ 11 axb3 a5! (but not 11...d5 12 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 13 ♕d3 with advantage) 12 ♕f2 ♗d7 13 ♘ge2 a4, seizing the initiative.

The text-move wins material, but enters a risky situation requiring caution. Black's kingside is vulnerable to strong pressure from White's bishop-pair.

9 ♗xc3 ♘xe4 10 ♕f4 *(D)*

10...♘f6

Almost a hundred years later in the game Granda-Fernandez Garcia, Pamplona 1991/2, Black replied 10...♖e7, resolute to bring to an end the threat which he feels strongly on the a2-g8 and a1-h8 diagonals. After 11 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 12 ♕xe4 ♕g5+ 13 ♖d2 he successfully finished his development by

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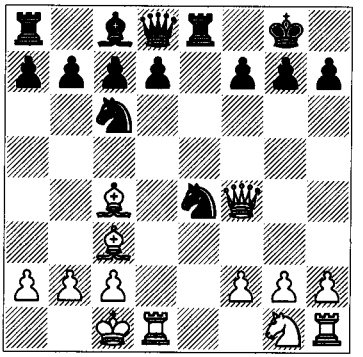

continuing 13...d5 14 ♕xd5 ♕xd5 15 ♖xd5 ♖xf2.

Instead, Steinitz keeps the material advantage, but falls under attack. This is in principle an erroneous decision of the type modern masters are likely to avoid.

11 ♘f3 d6

This time 11...d5 is not so good, since 12 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 13 ♕xf6 gxf6 14 ♗xd5 leads to an endgame in which Black's damaged pawn-structure remains a lasting liability.

12 ♘g5 ♗e6 13 ♗d3 h6 14 h4

14 ♗xf6 would be answered by 14...♕xf6.

14...♘d5 15 ♗h7+ ♔h8 16 ♖xd5! ♗xd5 17 ♗e4

At first glance this does look like the final blow. The g5-knight is obviously taboo, while not only 18 ♗xd5 but also 18 ♘xf7+ is threatened. Impressed, Steinitz reacts weakly and succumbs.

17...f6?

Several decades were to pass before Black found the escape-route from this seemingly desperate position in Heiffer-Seibold, correspondence game 1931: 17...♖xe4 18 ♘xe4 (18 ♘xf7+? fails to 18...♔g8) 18...♘e5 19 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 (19...cxd6? loses to 20 ♖d1) 20 ♗xe5 ♕c6. When he was already out of danger, 21 ♖d1 ♗xa2? (21...♗e4 is correct) 22 ♖d6 finally caught Black in the web.

18 ♗xd5 fxg5 19 hxg5 ♘e5 20 g6! 1-0

Belsitzman – Rubinstein

Warsaw 1917

Four Knights Opening

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗b5 ♘d4

After the usual 4...♗b4, the Four Knights Opening is characterized by peaceful play, but Rubinstein's continuation involves more danger and carries more risk.

5 ♗c4

On 5 ♘xe5 Black has at his disposal 5...♕e7, while 5 ♗a4 can, among other possibilities, be met by the sacrificial 5...♗c5 6 ♘xe5 0-0.

5...♗c5

Black could choose 5...♘xf3+ 6 ♕xf3 d6 7 d3 ♗e6 with level play, but Rubinstein looks for more.

6 ♘xe5 ♕e7 7 ♘d3

7 ♘xf7? d5 is bad for White, as is 7 ♗xf7+ ♔f8.

On 7 ♘f3 Black had in mind 7...d5, when after 8 ♘xd5, 8...♘xd5 leads to a draw, but the sharper 8...♕xe4+ 9 ♘e3 ♗g4 offers Black the initiative in return for the material he has given up.

7...d5!

By attacking the c5-bishop, White hoped to gain a moment of respite which would refute Black's attack, but the second sacrifice keeps the tension and accelerates Black's development.

8 ♘xd5

As the game Nimzowitsch-Alekhine, St Petersburg 1914 demonstrated, after 8 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 ♕xe4+ 10 ♘e3 ♗b6 11 0-0 ♗e6 Black's superior development gives him a long-term initiative.

8...♕xe4+ 9 ♘e3 ♗d6

Expecting White to castle kingside, which in the circumstances seems the only realistic solution, the bishop takes up an aggressive posting.

10 0-0?!

Owing to the cumbersome position of his pieces, White can hardly hope to castle queenside, but this move involves a high degree of risk. White should have tried instead 10 f3 ♕h4+ 11 ♘f2, although after 11...0-0 Black's pressure is still there.

10...b5!

Most energetic. The light-squared bishop will join his colleague, creating maximum pressure on the diagonals.

11 ♗b3 ♗b7 12 ♘e1 ♕h4 13 g3

13 h3 ♕f4 14 g3 ♕e4 is not attractive for White.

13...♕h3 14 c3 *(D)*

If the black knight now retreats, White will be able to parry the direct threats and then, if all is well, turn his material advantage into victory. However, some details make White's life precarious: his under-developed army, pushed back to the first ranks, need several tempi to come to life, while the

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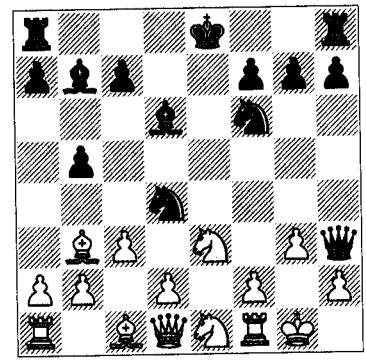

strong black force exerts tremendous pressure on the kingside. The clever reply which follows cannot be regarded as a fortuitous solution...

14...h5!

Leaving the knight *en prise*, Black hurries to open the h-file, when his rook will join the assault.

15 cxd4 h4 16 ♕e2?

White now succumbs to Black's attack directly, but he in fact had a way to keep the outcome unclear. As Burgess pointed out in *Chess Highlights of the 20th Century*, the critical move is 16 ♘f3!. He wrote: "Black's best continuation seems to be 16...hxg3 17 fxg3 ♗xg3 18 ♕e2 ♗xf3 19 ♖xf3 ♗xh2+ 20 ♔f2 ♗g3+ 21 ♖xg3 ♘e4+. Now 22 ♔f3? loses in spectacular style: 22...♕xg3+! 23 ♔xe4 ♕g6+ 24 ♔f3 (24 ♘f5 loses after 24...0-0-0) 24...♖h3+ 25 ♔f4 ♔f8! 26 ♕g2 ♕h6+ 27 ♔e4 ♕h7+ 28 ♔d5 (or 28 ♔f4 ♖e8) 28...♖h5+ 29 ♔c6 ♕h6+ 30 ♔b7 ♖e8, etc. However, 22 ♔e1 ♕xg3+ 23 ♔d1 is far less clear."

16...♕xh2+! 17 ♔xh2 hxg3++ 18 ♔g1 ♖h1# (0-1)

Sometimes, though not so often, chess-players are tolerant and magnanimously allow their opponents to carry out the winning idea to its natural end; a long-forgotten habit.

Bishops live in harmony with open spaces, and the open centre in particular. If they cooperate with rooks, their natural mobility and strength reach higher levels. This is the simple logic of the chessboard. However, even that simplest logic of chess, based on space advantage and activity of pieces, sometimes seems to be put on trial.

Ljubojević – Mecking
Las Palmas 1975
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 b5

This variation was played and passionately analysed by Lev Polugaevsky. It saw many ups and downs in the second half of the twentieth century. Although it was looked upon with deep scepticism, it has survived many violent attempts at refutation. At first 7...b5 was seen as an over-ambitious, precocious move on the wing, carried out at a moment when White was better developed and could strike in the centre, opening the position completely. Based on general principles, that simply could not pass.

8 e5 dxe5 9 fxe5 ♕c7

Black's idea relies upon this resource. Apart from being a tactical solution to the threat of 10 exf6, Black's queen takes its natural position on the c-file, whence it exerts pressure on the e5-pawn.

10 exf6

The main alternative is 10 ♕e2, which we analyse in the next game.

10...♕e5+ 11 ♗e2 ♕xg5 12 ♕d3

Against White's massive lead in development, Black's queenside appears vulnerable and his further development problematic. The text-move, prepared by David Bronstein and his second, the Soviet master Muchnik, for the grandmaster's encounter against Lev Polugaevsky in the Soviet championship of 1961, takes full advantage of the features of the position. It prepares either ♗f3 or ♘e4, threatens ♕f3, and vacates the first rank for queenside castling, whereupon new threats on the open d-file may cause serious aggravation.

12...♕xf6

For instance, 12...♗b7 is dealt with summarily by 13 ♗f3 ♗xf3 14 ♕xf3 ♖a7 15 ♘c6, while 12...♘d7 13 ♕f3 ♖a7 14 ♘e4 ♕d5 15 ♖d1 ♗b7 is severely punished by 16 fxg7 ♗xg7 17 ♘xb5!, both lines demonstrated by Polugaevsky.

13 ♖f1 *(D)*

13...♕e5

During the Belgrade tournament of 1974, Polugaevsky demonstrated to Minić and myself the continuation 13...♕g6 14 ♕f3 ♖a7 15 ♘c6 ♗b7 16 ♗d3 ♗xc6 17 ♕e3 ♕h5 18 ♕xa7 ♗d6 19 ♕f2 0-0 with good chances for Black, but professed more faith in the text-move. At that time he already knew from experience that the intermediary 12...♕h4+ 13 g3 ♕xf6 14

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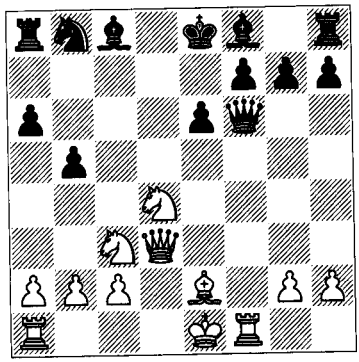


♖f1 ♕e5, as he played against Bronstein in the aforementioned game, just narrows his later possibilities by denying Black the f4-square.

The text-move brings about an incredible position. Black has invested no fewer than five tempi in queen moves and seven in pawn moves, and faces threats of all kinds and in spite of appearances holds on.

14 0-0-0

In several subsequent games White played 14 ♖d1, trying to avoid a later check to his king. Towards the end of his career Polugaevsky faced this move, and used the crucial defensive idea – 14...♖a7. After 15 ♘dxb5 ♖d7 16 ♕c4, 16...♔d8?! 17 ♘d4, threatening 18 ♖xf7 and keeping full pressure on the stranded king at d8, aggravated Black's position in Wolff-Polugaevsky, PCA Qualifier, Groningen 1993. However, 16...♗b7 gave Black a new lease of life: 17 ♖xd7 axb5 18 ♕c7 ♘xd7 19 ♕xb7 b4, proposed by Anand, looks valid. It is worth pointing out that 15 ♘f3 ♕c7 16 ♘e5 can be met by the calm 16...♗e7 17 ♘xf7 0-0, when White has little to show for all the promising prospects.

14...♖a7!

This move is a vital resource for Black in many lines of the Polugaevsky Variation. Once Black has moved the rook from this sensitive place to d7, Black will be able to parry the threats on the d-file and protect the vulnerable point f7. In the early days of the variation Polugaevsky thought that 14...♗c5 was good enough to solve his difficulties until Yudovich discovered 15 ♘xe6 ♕e3+ 16 ♖d2!! ♕xd3 17 ♘c7+ ♔d8 18 ♖xd3+ ♔xc7 19 ♖xf7+, when 19...♔b6 fails to 20 b4 and 19...♘d7 to 20 ♗g4 ♖d8 21 ♘e4 ♗f8 22 ♘g5.

15 ♘f3 ♕f4+ 16 ♘d2 ♕e5

The same year, Ljubojević as Black preferred 16...♕c7 17 ♗h5 g6 18 ♕d4 e5 19 ♕f2 ♗c5 20 ♕f6 0-0 in Gheorghiu-Ljubojević, IBM tournament, Amsterdam 1975. Now 21 ♘d5 seemed to crush any resistance, but there came the prepared, brilliant defensive reaction – 21...♗e7!!.

17 ♘f3 ♕f4+ 18 ♘d2 ♕d6?

Looking for more, Black will get less, but one must admit that what follows was not easy to see at the board.

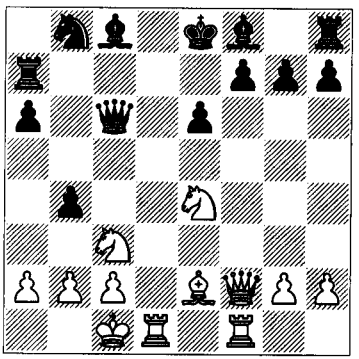
19 ♕f3!

The whole story revolves around Black's development. By attacking the f7-pawn, White prevents developing moves.

19...♕c6 20 ♘de4 b4

After 20...♖d7 21 ♖xd7 ♕xd7 22 ♕g3 ♘c6 23 ♖d1 we again see a conflict between active white and passive black pieces.

21 ♕f2!! *(D)*



We could say that Black's defence depends on the a7-rook. The subtle text-move overburdens this rook, which finds no place where it could continue successful defence.

21...♖d7?!

21...♖c7? loses to 22 ♘f6+ gxf6 23 ♕xf6 ♖d7 24 ♗h5, and 21...♕c7? to 22 ♗b5+. In case of 21...♕b7 White continues 22 ♗b5+ axb5 23 ♘xb5 with advantage.

22 ♖xd7 ♘xd7

22...♕xd7 fails to 23 ♗h5 bxc3 24 ♕b6!.

23 ♕xf7+ ♔d8 24 ♘g5 ♔c7 25 ♗f3 ♕d6 26 ♘xe6+ ♔b6 27 ♖d1 bxc3

Resignation.

28 ♖xd6+ ♗xd6 29 ♕xg7 ♗e5 30 ♕e7 cxb2+ 31 ♔b1 a5 32 ♘c5 ♘xc5 33 ♕xe5 1-0

Subsequent decades could add little to the ideas expressed by Lev Polugaevsky in his brilliant book *Rozhdenie Varianta* (The Birth of a Variation), published in Moscow in 1977, and later published in English as part of the book *Grandmaster Preparation*. I thought it was worth analysing this stunning line of the Sicilian and this remarkable game in the light of our topic, the open centre. All the white pieces were centralized and creating threats on the open d-file, semi-open f-file and light-squared diagonals. Opposing them were just the queen perched on the superb central e5-square, helped by the lonely rook on its second rank, and this created the most improbable dynamic balance. Black succumbed to an extraordinary, hidden stab all across the board, but the practice of several decades proves that he could have defended the position, as if defying chess experience and logic itself. It shows that the positions characterized by the open centre do not only favour attackers, but offer rich possibilities to the defenders as well. Unfortunately, to defend such risky positions stubbornly, resisting move after move in highly complex surroundings, seems to be a challenge that few players are willing to undertake very frequently. In the labyrinth of continuations it is quite easy to miss the right path or overlook a deeply hidden resource. Another game in the Polugaevsky Variation reinforces this impression...

Atanasov – Pasev

Correspondence game 1989
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 b5 8 e5 dxe5 9 fxe5 ♕c7 10 ♕e2

Avoiding the line we analysed in the previous game, White prepares to castle queenside and intends then to move the queen further along the same diagonal to g4 or perhaps h5.

10...♘fd7

A tactical point supporting White's last move is that 10...♗b4 11 exf6 ♗xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♕xc3+ fails to 13 ♕d2 ♕xa1+ 14 ♔f2 with threats which cannot be parried; for instance: 14...0-0 15 fxg7 ♖e8 16 ♗f6 ♘d7 17 ♗d3 ♕xh1 18 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 19 ♕d3+ ♔h6 20 ♕e3+, etc.

11 0-0-0 ♗b7

The e5-pawn is obviously indirectly defended by the threat on d8, while after 11...♘c6 12 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 13 ♕d3 followed by 14 ♗e2, Black will feel uncomfortable on the long light-square diagonal.

12 ♕g4 ♕b6

The e5-pawn looks abandoned, but 12...♘xe5? would be answered severely by 13 ♘xe6 fxe6 14 ♕xe6+ ♗e7 15 ♗xb5+ with a crushing attack. 12...♕xe5, on the other hand, adds the semi-open e-file to White's list of assets. The continuation after 12...♘c6? demonstrates how serious Black's developing problems are; White strikes by 13 ♗xb5 axb5 14 ♘cxb5 ♕a5 15 ♘xe6, demolishing Black's defence. Therefore the cautious text-move, after which the sacrificial idea loses its strength.

13 ♗e2

Boleslavsky analysed 13 ♗xb5 axb5 14 ♘dxb5 ♘xe5 15 ♕f4 ♘bc6, parrying the major threats.

13...♘xe5

If 13...h6, then 14 ♕h3.

14 ♕h3!

Minić, who was deeply involved in opening analysis in those days, analysed 14 ♕h5 ♘bd7 15 ♖he1 ♘f6 16 ♗xf6 gxf6 17 ♘xe6! ♕xe6 18 ♗g4 f5 19 ♔b1, but speaking in tennis terms 15...♘f6? is an unforced error.

14...♘bd7 15 ♖he1 h6 16 ♗h4 *(D)*

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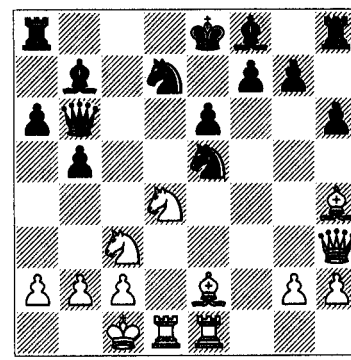


16...g5?

White's threat was 17 ♘xe6 fxe6 (or 17...♕xe6 18 ♗g4) 18 ♗h5+. The text-move appears to parry it, as Polugaevsky himself thought. Kavalek-Polugaevsky, Manila 1975 now continued 17 ♗xg5 ♖g8! 18 ♘xe6 hxg5, and Black took initiative in spite of all the dangers hanging over his head. Let us note that the direct threat can be met by 16...g6 (16...h5, which was played in Chandler-Vera, World Junior Ch, Innsbruck 1977, controls the critical squares g4 and h5, but weakens the g5-square and so 17 ♗f3 ♗xf3 18 ♘xf3 ♘g4 19 ♘g5 is dangerous for Black) 17 ♗g4 h5 18 ♗xe6 ♗h6+ 19 ♔b1 fxe6 20 ♘xe6 ♔f7. However,

Polugaevsky's defence stood firm for almost 15 long years, until a patient correspondence player saw the same position with new eyes...

17 ♘xe6!

This time White strikes more painfully.

17...fxe6

17...♕xe6 loses to 18 ♗g4. 17...gxh4 may be a better practical chance, although 18 ♗h5 has a paralysing effect on Black's position.

18 ♗f2!

18 ♗xg5 would just allow Black to escape to safety by castling queenside: 18...hxg5 19 ♕xh8 0-0-0.

After the text-move, however, the critical point e6 cannot be defended (18...♕c6 19 ♗f3) and the attack breaks through.

18...♕xf2

18...♗c5 looks promising at first glance, but then 19 ♗xc5 ♘xc5 (worse is 19...♕xc5 20 ♕xe6+ and now either 20...♔d8 21 ♗xb5! or 20...♕e7 21 ♗h5+ ♔d8 22 ♖xd7+!) 20 ♗h5+ ♘f7 21 b4 0-0 22 bxc5 ♕xc5 23 ♖xe6 and the threat of 24 ♗xf7+ cannot be parried successfully.

19 ♕xe6+ ♔d8 20 ♗xb5 ♕xe1

In dire necessity, says a Croatian proverb, the devil devours even fleas. 20...axb5 21 ♖xe5 also leaves the house in ruins.

21 ♖xe1 axb5 22 ♖xe5 ♘xe5

Or 22...♖h7 23 ♕e8+ ♔c7 24 ♘xb5+ ♔b6 25 ♕g6+ ♗c6 26 ♖e6.

23 ♕xe5 ♖g8

Black has preserved a lot of material, but there is no coordination between his pieces and so the relatively small white force dictates the terms of play. In case of 23...♖h7 there is 24 ♕f5.

24 ♘d5

At a moment when the knight cannot be eliminated, it joins the queen in the final assault. Black's major shortcoming, his lack of coordination, continues to harass him until the end...

24...♖g7 25 ♕f6+ ♔e8 26 ♕e6+ ♔d8?

This loses quickly. Stronger resistance is offered by 26...♖e7 27 ♕g6+ ♔d8.

27 ♕b6+ ♔c8

Or 27...♔e8 28 ♘f6+, etc.

28 ♕f6 ♖d7 29 ♕xf8+ ♖d8 30 ♕c5+ ♔d7 31 ♘b6+ ♔e8 32 ♘xa8 ♗xa8 33 ♕xb5+ 1-0

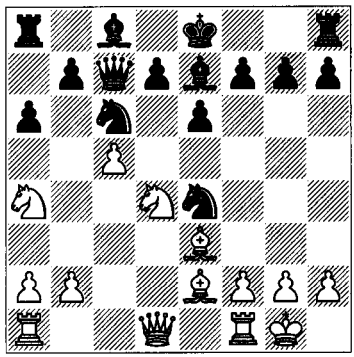
As soon as the pawn-centre disintegrates, tactical chances increase significantly. Sometimes they are so numerous and so deeply concealed that the final verdict on the position remains hidden for decades. However, these last Sicilian games do confirm that commanding the open centre can at least be worth the sacrificed material. Let us add another position characterized by a modern pawn-structure.

Velimirović – Miladinović
Yugoslav Team Ch, Nikšić 1997
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 ♕c7 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 ♗e3 ♗b4 9 ♘a4 ♗e7 10 c4 ♘xe4 11 c5 *(D)*

This is one of the positions in the Taimanov Sicilian which has been

B



analysed extensively in the last decade. White has just sacrificed a central pawn and Black has grabbed it, which reminds me of the old advice to grab each central pawn even at the cost of some inconvenience. White believes in his superior development and even more in the passivity of his opponent's set-up. Black relies on the firmness of his position, which at present has no weak points. From the point of view of our topic, this is a somewhat unusual position, in which the central files are not open, but the centre itself is free of pawns.

11...0-0

After 11...f5 12 g3 ♘xd4 13 ♕xd4 0-0 14 ♖ac1 it proves difficult for Black to free his game. Then 14...♘g5 15 f4 ♘f7 16 ♘b6 ♖b8 17 ♖fd1 kept the lid on Black's position in Čabrilo-Kogan, Šabac 1998.

12 ♖c1

12 g3 also demands a cautious response from Black. 12...♖b8 13 ♗f3 f5 14 ♗f4 e5 15 ♘xf5, for instance, works in White's favour, but the text-move is more natural.

12...f5

The question is how to free Black's game, considering that opening the position generally favours the side which commands the spatial advantage. 12...♖d8 was met by the surprising 13 ♕b3 in Shirov-Leko, Frankfurt rapid 1996, when 13...♘xd4 14 ♗xd4 ♘d2 would have been parried by 15 ♕b6 (Shirov). The game continuation, 13...♖b8 14 ♖fd1 d5 15 cxd6 ♗xd6 16 ♗f3, satisfied Shirov. Karpov's more cautious approach against Kamsky in Buenos Aires 1994 was not an easy road to equality either: 12...♖b8 13 g3 ♘f6 14 ♗f3 g6 15 ♘b6 ♖d8 16 ♕a4.

13 g3

13 f4 is possible, when 13...♖b8 14 ♗f3 ♗f6 15 ♗xe4 fxe4 16 ♘xc6 bxc6 17 ♖c4 was favourable for White in Shirov-Miladinović, Belgrade 1995. However, the critical reply is 13...d5 14 cxd6 ♗xd6 and now 15 ♗d3 ♘f6 (Shirov), while 15 ♘xc6 bxc6 16 ♘b6 ♖b8 17 ♘xc8 also comes into consideration.

13...♖b8

In order to get rid of the constant threat from f4, 13...♗g5 was played in Anand-Ljubojević, Amber blindfold, Monaco 1998, which continued 14 ♗xg5 (14 f4 followed by 15 ♗f3 comes into consideration) 14...♘xg5 15 ♘b6 ♖b8 16 ♘c4. Instead, Miladinović challenges his opponent at once.

14 ♗f4

After 14 ♕b3 Black replied shrewdly 14...♔h8 15 ♖fd1 d5 in Shirov-Lautier, Amber blindfold, Monaco 1998, giving back material to free himself from the stifling pressure. Then 16

cxd6 ♗xd6 17 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 18 ♕xe6 ♖be8 19 ♕b3 ♘xf2! led all of a sudden to a strong attack for Black. In Anand-Lautier, Amber rapid, Monaco 1998, 14 ♗f3 was well met by 14...♘g5 15 ♗g2 e5 and Black was set free.

14...e5 15 ♘xf5 exf4 16 ♕d5+ ♔h8 17 ♘xe7

17 ♕xe4 would be met by 17...d5 18 cxd6 ♗xd6.

17...♘xe7 18 ♕xe4 d5

The same idea works again. Black develops quickly and establishes equality.

19 cxd6 ♕xd6 20 ♖fd1 ♕f6 21 ♕d4 fxg3 22 hxg3 ♕g5 23 ♘c5 ♗h3 24 ♕d2 ♕g6 25 ♗d3 ♕f7 26 ♗c4 ½-½

A spatial advantage and superiority in the open centre are valuable assets. In our game, apart from his material compensation, it took patience and precision for Black to free himself.

Conclusions

With the games in this chapter in our mind, we could say that the open centre is a simple phenomenon. Open space, in which no pawns bar the freedom of movement, sets an ideal scene for piece activity. In particular, long-ranged bishops on the diagonals crossing the centre thrive in this environment, but so also do the major pieces pressing down the open files. That same absence of barriers multiplies the possibilities and accelerates attacks, which with the closed centre would take the form of slow manoeuvres. Here there is no time for manoeuvre. Attacks are necessarily quick, precisely directed, concentrated on a precise motif. In such circumstances the element of time becomes a major factor. Consequently, the struggle to gain a lead in development and for the initiative are distinctive characteristics of all the games in our survey. It is not by chance that queenside castling reappears game after game, as it speeds the process of development and quickly creates the conditions for an attack.

It comes as no surprise that most of these games are won by tactical skill. Material sacrifice is frequently justified by a spatial advantage and a strong initiative, which are so often outer expressions of the time factor. There lies the reason why gambits are frequently characterized by the open centre, and also the reason why the essentially same method of play meets the requirements of all open positions. Looking back at the list of the analysed games, we notice at once that we find open centres in various systems and variations, and that the problems and solutions get more complex as we enter deeper into the 20th century, but the essential manner in which these positions are treated has not changed since the days of Morphy and Anderssen. The general guidelines about time and material, development, initiative, sacrifice, etc., remain the same. What did change, however, is the attitude of the modern master. While respecting the general principles, he abandoned the simplistic rules of development a long time ago and nowadays looks at each position with ingrained scepticism. Each position is treated as a unique

case with rules of its own. His aim is to understand those rules and comply. If he lacked that attitude, Lev Polugaevsky would never have immersed himself in a position built by seven pawn and five queen moves in the critical opening stage, challenging not only some theoretical standards, but practical experience too.

But where do the pawns come in here?

In sharp contrast with all the other types of centre, in which the influence of pawns on the general strategy is dominant, their role in the open centre is diminished by the very nature of the position, but it cannot be ignored. It is limited to the early stage of the game, when pawns usually play one of two roles. In one scenario they represent the material to be sacrificed in order to seize the initiative: material gets transformed into time. In the other scenario, equally frequent, they are exchanged in early battles in order to open space in the centre and create the preconditions for action. As I pointed out above, their very absence tells, causing and shaping actions and imposing on the course of the game a distinctive method of play, based on the initiative and activity.

I conclude this discussion with a little practical advice: in general, positions characterized by the open centre favour White, and Black should not enter them light-heartedly. If you happen to be there, White or Black, invest in development and active counterplay: in open positions time is the crucial element. Naturally, while this may be useful to bear in mind, strong players know that each position is a specific case to be placed under thorough, precise analytical scrutiny. The above games played in the Polugaevsky Variation provide a warning that we should heed. Even when facing ideas that challenge the firmly established beliefs or border on the improbable, we have to take them seriously and check them conscientiously move by move. On a higher level it has always been so.

3 The Closed Centre

In complete contrast to the open centre, the closed centre is occupied by pawns. Their mission is to claim a share of the valuable central space and the power it yields. That apparent primary task, however, is not their final aim, which goes beyond the initial achievement and stretches far into the middlegame. The power exercised in the centre would be futile if further play could not be built upon it. As a matter of fact, the only way we can assess the centre is in relation to the potential activity generated by it. No matter how strong and monumental a pawn-centre appears, if it is immobile and if no action can be undertaken on its basis, it will soon show signs of deterioration. Such a centre often becomes the target of the enemy forces and may even be demolished in a sacrificial counter-attack.

There are two basic types of closed centre: the blocked centre and the fixed centre. We consider these in turn.

The Blocked Centre

The blocked centre is characterized by a pawn blockade which divides the board, closing lines and diagonals. Sometimes there are possibilities of pawn-thrusts on one of the central files, but in case of a full blockade the simple fact that the central squares are occupied determines the direction the game will take: given that the centre is inaccessible, the battles are waged on the wings. The strong blocked centre implies a spatial preponderance and manoeuvring freedom. Sometimes such a centre is so stable that it allows the stronger side to play on both wings simultaneously. If the power is shared proportionately, we usually watch attack and counter-attack taking place on different wings. The central pawn-formation being fixed or blocked, it reduces active possibilities significantly. In contrast with the dynamic centre, here the choice of plans is limited as well as routine in their performance and their nature itself. A relatively small number of games will suffice to demonstrate these straightforward truths. We shall examine first some blocked centres arising in the French Defence, historically first explored and understood.

Tarrasch – Schiffers
Vienna 1908
French Defence

1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e5 ♘fd7 6 ♗xe7

The sacrificial continuation 6 h4 offers more objectively, but not every

player is willing to sacrifice material so soon.

6...♕xe7 7 ♘b5

The centre is blocked and active play must be sought on the wings. Before White's pawn-centre is exposed to strong pressure by ...c5 and ...f6, the knight manoeuvre ♘b5-a3-c2 will strengthen the most vulnerable point of the pawn-chain.

7...♘b6

Better and more active than 7...♕d8.

8 c3 a6 9 ♘a3 c5

The head of the pawn-chain (e5) could be subjected to pressure at once by 9...f6 10 ♘f3 ♘8d7, when 11 exf6 ♕xf6 12 ♗d3 e5 frees Black, but attacking the base (d4) is also natural. Both continuations fight for living space and both are logical.

10 ♘c2 ♘c6

Tarrasch gained some experience of the immediate 10...cxd4 a couple of years later: 11 ♕xd4 ♕c7 12 ♘f3 left White in command of the important central d4-square in Bernstein-Tarrasch, San Sebastian 1911.

11 f4 cxd4?!

The c-file can be opened at will and there was no reason to rush. Instead 11...♘a4 12 ♖b1 b5 13 ♘f3 ♗d7 14 ♕d2 ♖c8 15 ♗d3 ♘b6 widens Black's options on the queenside, as in Lasker-Lilienthal, Moscow 1925.

12 cxd4 ♗d7 13 b3 ♖c8 14 ♕d2

Due to the error at move 11, Black's activity on the queenside has been thwarted and it will take time to give the clumsy black knights some purpose in the struggle ahead.

14...0-0 15 ♘f3 f5

The blocked centre often offers a false sense of security. Schiffers obviously feels comfortable behind the pawn-wall, but as a matter of fact his king would feel much better if the f-file were opened by 15...f6 followed by 16...fxe5.

16 ♗d3 ♖c7 17 0-0 ♔h8 18 ♔h1

Both players understand that the breakthrough will be carried out on the g-file: the kings, therefore, seek refuge elsewhere.

18...♗e8 19 h3

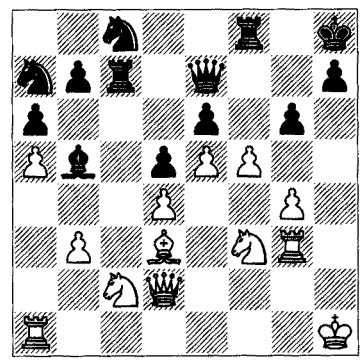
White does not hide his aggressive intent. He intends to meet 19...♗h5 with the sharp 20 g4 fxg4 21 ♘g5.

19...♘a7 20 a4 ♘c6 21 g4

While Black is doing everything possible to provoke some weaknesses on the queenside, White has far more concrete threats on the other wing.

21...g6 22 a5 ♘c8 23 ♖g1 ♘6a7 24 ♖g3 fxg4 25 hxg4 ♗b5 26 f5! *(D)*

B



25...♗b5 did not prevent this thematic thrust. What has logically and consistently been carried out must yield good fruits.

26...♗xd3

26...exf5 27 gxf5 gxf5 28 ♖ag1 opens the g-file to White's advantage.

27 f6

This bone in the throat cannot be removed by surgical operation because 27...♖xf6 28 exf6 ♕d6 comes across 29 ♘e5 ♗xc2 30 ♕h6 threatening 31 f7.

27...♕e8 28 ♕xd3 ♘b5 29 ♘g5 ♖c3 30 ♕xc3! ♘xc3 31 ♖xc3

It is easy to check that the queen sacrifice is correct: it's enough to imagine a white rook on the h-file or the seventh rank.

31...h6 32 ♖h3 ♕c6 33 ♖xh6+ ♔g8 34 ♖xg6+ ♔h8 35 ♘e1 ♘e7 36 ♖h6+ ♔g8 37 ♘g2 ♕c3 38 ♖e1 ♘c6 39 ♖g6+ ♔h8 40 ♖e3 1-0

Tarrasch demonstrated how to take advantage of the blocked, stable centre by launching a wing attack using his pawns. He threw his weight behind the kingside pawn assault, while playing a minimal number of preventive moves on the queenside.

Pillsbury – Em.Lasker

Nuremberg 1895/6
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 f4 c5 6 dxc5

Today White prefers to keep the tension in the centre by 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 7 ♗e3.

6...♘c6

6...♗xc5 7 ♕g4 g6 is an alternative, but the waiting text-move looks reasonable.

7 a3

7 ♘f3 ♗xc5 8 ♗d3 a6 would be pleasant for Black.

With the text-move, White keeps the d1-h5 diagonal open in order to meet the expected 7...♗xc5 with 8 ♕g4, although 8...g6 9 ♘f3 a6, followed by 10...b5, is in my opinion acceptable for Black.

7...♘xc5 8 b4 ♘d7 9 ♗d3 a5

Black eventually succeeds in creating a strong c5-square, but at the cost of precious time.

10 b5 ♘cb8 11 ♘f3 ♘c5 12 ♗e3 ♘bd7 13 0-0 g6

This move will sooner or later be necessary, because the f5 advance is hanging in the air. However, experienced players know that such moves weaken the position as much as they act preventively.

14 ♘e2

The d4-square is White's strong square, reserved for his knight.

14...♗e7 15 ♕e1 ♘b6

After 15...♘xd3 16 cxd3 ♘c5 17 ♕c3 b6 18 ♘fd4 Black would have to solve some other difficulties.

16 ♘fd4 ♗d7 17 ♕f2

White threatens 18 ♘xe6.

17...♘ba4

17...♖c8 comes into consideration.

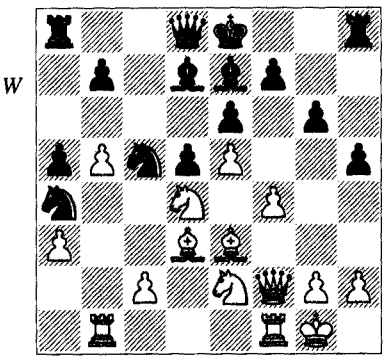
18 ♖ab1

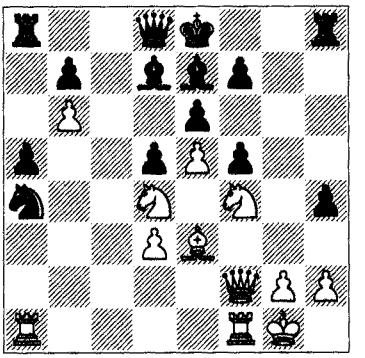
Now White is threatening g4, followed by f5.

18...h5 *(D)*

Black again resorts to a preventive move, and this further weakens his kingside. Learning from the following events, we would consider 18...0-0, intending to answer 19 g4 with 19...f5.

19 b6!





White vacates the b5-square and opens a breach in the defensive array.

19...♘xd3 20 cxd3 ♗xa3?!

Lasker was a courageous player who often entered risky positions. This time the risk was very high. Grabbing an insignificant pawn, he leaves his king unprotected and the reaction comes at once.

21 f5!

By vacating the f4-square for the knight, White concentrates his forces for the final assault.

21...gxf5 22 ♘f4 h4?!

This move was played to protect against 23 ♕g3. Black forgets he is vulnerable on the a-file. The alternative is 22...♗b4 intending to meet 23 ♕g3 with 23...♔f8 followed, if necessary, by 24...h4. In that case 23 ♘xf5 exf5 24 ♘xd5 comes into consideration.

23 ♖a1 ♗e7 *(D)*

24 ♖xa4!

White first forces the light-squared bishop to leave the defence of the e6-pawn, the mainstay of the black pawn-structure. This clears the way for further sacrifices to break through to the black king, which is currently hidden behind a mass of pawns and pieces.

24...♗xa4 25 ♘dxe6! fxe6 26 ♘xe6

White is a rook down, but all his force is concentrated in attack, in contrast to the disoriented black pieces.

26...♗d7

After 26...♕c8 there is 27 ♕xf5 ♕c6 (or 27...♖g8 28 ♘c7+ ♔d8 29 e6 ♗c6 30 ♕f7 ♖e8 31 ♕g7 followed by 32 ♖f7) 28 ♗g5 ♕xb6+ 29 d4 ♕b4 30 ♕f7+ ♔d7 31 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 32 ♘c5+ ♔d8 33 ♘xb7+ ♔d7 34 ♘c5+ ♔d8 35 ♕xd5+, etc. This will help Lasker's resignation...

27 ♘xd8 ♖xd8 28 ♗c5 ♖c8 29 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 30 ♕e3 ♖c6 31 ♕g5+ ♔f7 32 ♖c1 ♖xc1+ 33 ♕xc1 ♖c8 34 ♕e1 h3 35 gxh3 ♖g8+ 36 ♔f2 a4 37 ♕b4 ♖g6 38 ♔f3 a3 39 ♕xa3 ♖xb6 40 ♕c5 ♖e6 41 ♕c7 ♔e7 42 ♔f4 b6 43 h4 ♖c6 44 ♕b8 ♗e8 45 ♔xf5 ♖h6 46 ♕c7+ ♔f8 47 ♕d8 b5 48 e6 ♖h7 49 ♔e5 b4 50 ♕d6+ 1-0

Looking back at the far-away time when these games were played, we

recognize the skill of the attackers. The blocked centre led Tarrasch and Pillsbury to logical conclusions and natural reactions. They both played harmoniously on both wings with great tactical expertise, revealing the vulnerable points of their opponent's positions while emphasizing their own advantages. Black, on the contrary, missed a number of fine but typical points. Some decades were to pass before the defence in the blocked positions of the French was raised to higher levels. It took even longer for Black to tackle the defensive tasks we encounter in some of the following games.

Smyslov – Panov
Moscow Ch 1943
Old Indian

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♘c3 ♘bd7 4 ♘f3 e5 5 g3 c6 6 ♗g2 ♗e7

For a period of time it was believed that this move-order prevents White from playing a kingside fianchetto because of 6...e4, when 7 ♘g5 is met by 7...d5, but 7 ♘h4, as in Keene-Minić, Zagreb 1975, dispelled these doubts.

7 0-0 0-0 8 e4 ♖e8 9 h3 ♕c7 10 d5

Keeping the tension by 10 ♗e3 ♘f8 11 ♖c1 favours White, who has at his disposal more useful waiting moves and greater opportunity for useful manoeuvres. However, by blocking the centre White accentuates the passive position of the e7-bishop and the e8-rook and Black's lack of breathing space in general.

10...♘f8

Commentators pointed out that after 10...cxd5 11 cxd5 ♘c5 12 ♘e1 a5 13 ♗e3, followed by 14 ♖c1, Black would be vulnerable on the queenside, but 10...♘c5 11 ♘e1 a5 12 ♗e3 ♗d7 came into consideration, although in comparison with the kindred position of the King's Indian, Black's set-up is obviously more passive.

11 ♘e1

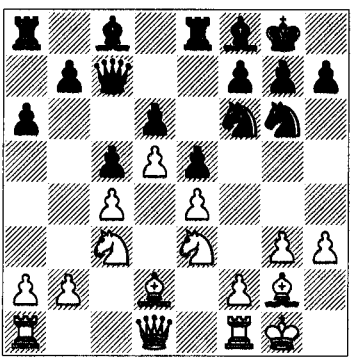
The knight is bound for e3, from where it will exert its influence on both sides of the board. In closed positions well-planned manoeuvres are the salt of good play.

11...♘g6 12 ♘c2 a6 13 ♘e3 ♗f8

In positions of this type, a false sense of security, the feeling that there is time for everything, often leads to such unnecessary moves. 13...♗d7 was better.

14 ♗d2 c5? *(D)*

This time 14...♗d7, searching for counterplay by 15...♖ac8 and 16...♕b8, was called for. By blocking the position, Black deprives himself of any counterplay, which in this type of position is essential.



15 a3!

As a matter of fact White intends to play on the kingside, but before it is set in motion he wants to neutralize any activity on the queenside.

15...♖b8 16 b4 b6

Black has been subdued; he gives up the intended 16...b5 because of 17 cxb5 axb5 18 a4 ♗d7 19 ♘xb5 ♗xb5 20 axb5 ♖xb5 21 ♕a4 ♖eb8 22 ♖fc1.

17 ♖e1 ♗d7 18 ♗f1

In the King's Indian and related systems, the f1-square is often used by the fianchettoed bishop to control the queenside.

18...♕c8 19 ♔h2 ♘e7 20 ♕f3 ♖d8 21 g4

While Black, short of space, is indulging in unnatural manoeuvres on his back ranks, White finally opens a new front. Given that the centre is stable and the queenside fully controlled, there are excellent preconditions for an attack.

21...♘e8 22 ♘f5

To Black's annoyance, the knight's long journey finishes in this attacking and unassailable position. Taking the knight would vacate the e4-square for the queen's knight, while chasing it away by ...g6 endangers the black king even more.

22...♕c7 23 ♖ac1 ♖dc8 24 b5

The time has come for White to throw all his weight behind the attack. The waterproof blockade of the queenside will deny Black any counterplay.

24...♖a8 25 a4 a5

In case of 25...axb5 26 cxb5 the vacant c4-square could be an interesting alternative for the f5-knight.

26 ♗d3

Positioned at d3, the bishop will deny Black any chance of taking on f5.

26...♕d8 27 ♖h1 ♖c7 28 ♖cg1 ♘g6 29 g5 ♖aa7 30 h4 ♘h8 31 ♔g2

The king moves to the secure refuge of the queenside, emphasizing Black's impotence.

31...g6 32 ♔f1 ♗c8

One need hardly mention that after 32...gxf5 33 exf5 White will continue 34 ♘e4.

33 h5 ♖ab7 34 ♖h2 ♖a7 35 ♔e1 ♖ab7 36 ♔d1 ♖a7 37 ♔c2 ♖ab7 38 ♔b3 ♖a7 39 ♕g3 ♖ab7 40 f4

It was inevitable that the pawn rampart c5-d6-e5 would sooner or later be weakened by a side-blow of this type.

40...exf4 41 ♗xf4 ♖a7 42 ♘d1

The knight is transferred to g4 to deliver the final blow.

42...gxf5 43 exf5 ♘g7 44 ♘e3 h6 45 f6 1-0

Petrosian – Lutikov

USSR Ch, Tbilisi 1959

King's Indian/Benoni

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 0-0 5 d4 d6 6 ♗e2 e5 7 d5

This early blockade in the Classical variation eases Black's developing difficulties, but against a player of a sharp style like Lutikov it was a wise psychological weapon.

7...♘a6

Often this move is preceded by 7...a5, opposing at once the expected pawn advance on the queenside, but the flexible text-move is played with a

similar intention: 8 0-0 would be met by 8...♘c5 9 ♘d2 a5.

8 ♗g5 h6 9 ♗h4 c5

Stepping out of the pin by 9...♕e8 followed by preparing kingside play with 10...♘h7 has always looked to me somewhat elaborate and slow, but 9...g5 10 ♗g3 ♘xe4 11 ♘xe4 f5 12 ♘fd2 fxe4 13 ♘xe4 ♗f5 is clear and more energetic. As in the previous game, Black builds the defensive wall c5-d6-e5, but it was much more important for him to neutralize the pressure on the kingside.

10 ♘d2 ♗d7?!

After 9...c5 one would expect the consistent 10...♘c7. In Geller-Ljubojević, Interzonal tournament, Petropolis 1973, Black stepped out of the pin by 10...♕e8 11 0-0 ♘h7, but then 12 ♘b5 ♕d7 13 ♗g3! followed by 14 f4 flatly refuted the idea. Geller's excellent reaction points out again how the pawn-wall c5-d6-e5 is sensitive to this sort of side-blow.

11 ♘b5

Unpleasant and difficult to meet in a natural way, this move will cause disorder in Black's general plan.

11...♗e8 12 a3

Expecting 12...♘c7, White is attentive to Black's counterplay: then 13 ♘c3 a6 14 b4 would keep it in check.

12...♕d7 13 g4

White's stable centre and well-placed pieces enable him to play on both wings.

13...♘c7

13...♘h7, preparing 14...♗f6 and 15...♗g5, would be thwarted by 14 ♗g3 and 15 h4.

14 ♘c3 a6 15 a4

15 b4 also came into consideration, but White is aiming at throttling down any activity on this side of the board. He demonstrated with his 13th move where he sees his chances.

15...♕c8 16 h3

By overprotecting his g-pawn, White prepares to move his pieces to better positions: the queen to c2, and the queen's knight to e3.

16...♖b8 17 ♕c2 ♗d7

17...b5 would be answered by 18 a5!, when the ostensible counterplay would come to a stop at once.

18 b3 b6 19 ♘d1 b5 20 a5 ♔h8

20...bxc4 opens the file, but in vain: all the critical penetrating squares are under control.

21 ♗g3 ♘g8 22 ♘e3 ♘e7

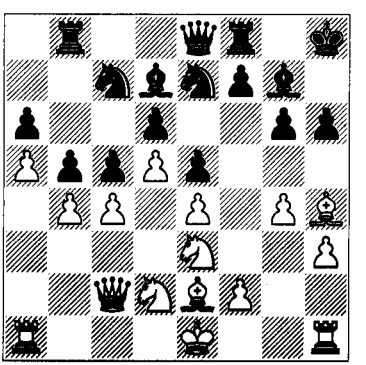
Black is hoping to play 23...f5, but White refuses to allow this.

23 ♗h4 ♕e8?

Black had to play 23...♘g8.

24 b4! *(D)*

B



Black's queen move exposed him to this vicious tactical stroke. We have

encountered the undermining blow f4 against the pawn-wall on various occasions, but Petrosian's stroke is no more tender. Both 24...bxc4 25 bxc5 and 24...cxb4 25 c5 are painful for Black.

24...♘c8 25 bxc5 dxc5 26 cxb5 ♘xb5 27 ♗xb5 ♖xb5 28 0-0 f5 29 f3

White limits the activity of Black's bishop-pair by taking care to keep the position closed.

29...♖f7

With a compromised pawn-structure, one cannot afford neutral moves. From Lutikov one would expect 29...h5, but he must have been discouraged by the course of the game.

30 ♘dc4 ♖b4

Another useless move playing into White's hands.

31 ♗e1 ♖b7 32 ♗c3 h5

After the bishop transfer to c3 the pressure on Black's position has increased dramatically and this attempt comes too late.

33 gxf5 gxf5 34 exf5 e4 35 ♔h2 exf3 36 ♖xf3 ♗d4 37 ♕d3 ♗f6 38 ♖g1 ♔h7 39 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 40 ♕c3 ♕f8 41 ♖g6 ♖f7 42 ♖g5 1-0

Spassky – Ghitescu

Beverwijk 1967

Czech Benoni

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 ♘c3 d6 5 e4 ♗e7 6 ♘f3

In this system, Black relies on a full pawn blockade and, contrary to the King's Indian, develops his dark-squared bishop to e7. One of his basic positional motifs is the manoeuvre ...♘e8 and ...♗g5, when the exchange of the bishops would diminish White's attacking potential on the kingside and consequently ease Black's defence. By 6 ♘f3 White takes measures against it.

6...0-0 7 ♗d3 ♘bd7

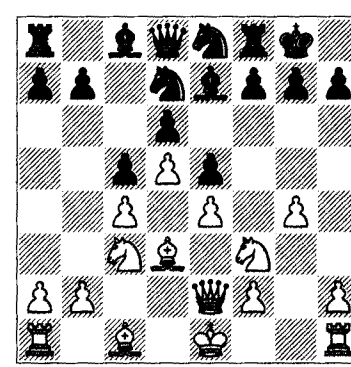
After 7...♗g4 8 h3 ♗xf3 9 ♕xf3 White's preponderance on the kingside cannot be challenged. After 9...♘e8, White would efficiently prevent the coveted exchange of the dark-squared bishops by 10 h4. In case of the immediate 7...♘e8 White would prevent the idea altogether by 8 h3.

8 ♕e2 ♘e8?!

A superficial decision. White's 8th move announced his intention to castle queenside, which given the situation in the centre forebodes a kingside pawn attack. Black should either use this tempo to prepare queenside counterplay by 8...a6 or try to thwart the planned activity on the kingside by 8...♘h5 9 g3 ♘df6 for instance.

9 g4 *(D)*

B



White has been presented with the opportunity to speed up his aggressive

play and he seizes it. His prospects lie in an energetic pawn advance against the black king.

9...g6 10 ♗h6 ♘g7 11 0-0-0 ♘f6 12 h3 a6 13 ♖dg1 ♗d7?!

Carrying out ...b5 would help little: White would just ignore it. Better was to be realistic and include the queen's rook in the defence by 13...b6 and 14...♖a7.

14 ♘d2

A fine place for the knight in case of ...b5 or ...f5 or if it needs to move to e3 or g3.

14...♔h8 15 h4 ♘g8 16 ♗e3 h5

After 16...f5 17 gxf5 gxf5 18 exf5 a splendid position for the knight is created at e4. Given that in case of 16...♗xh4 17 g5 the bishop is trapped, Black does what he must do.

17 g5 ♗e8 18 f4

The pawn-wall is always susceptible to side-blows of the type.

18...f5

Since 19 f5 cannot be allowed and 18...exf4 19 ♗xf4 is unappealing, we witness a typical scene when opening the position inevitably hurts the passive side...

19 gxf6 ♘xf6 20 fxe5 dxe5 21 ♘f3 ♘g4?

The final error. 21...♗d6 was necessary.

22 ♖xg4! hxg4 23 ♘xe5 ♘h5 24 ♘xg4

Given his powerful passed pawns, White does not think twice about sacrificing both exchanges.

24...♘g3 25 ♕g2 ♘xh1 26 e5 ♖f7 27 ♕xh1 ♖h7 28 e6 ♗g5

Clever, but not sufficient.

29 ♕e4 ♗xe3+ 30 ♕xe3 ♕e7 31 ♘e4 ♖xh4 32 ♘ef6 ♕c7 33 ♗e4 ♕a5 34 ♕g3 g5 35 ♘xe8 ♖xe8 36 ♕e5+ 1-0

Geller – Mecking

Interzonal tournament, Palma de Mallorca 1970

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♘a5 10 ♗c2 c5 11 d4 ♕c7 12 ♘bd2 ♘c6

This is the oldest and the most principled line of the Chigorin Variation of the Ruy Lopez. Black increases the pressure on the pawn-centre, so as to provoke an immediate response – White either exchanges on e5 or blocks the centre, which is the option chosen in this game.

13 d5

In spite of its apparently blunting effect on the position, this blocking of the centre does not reduce the fighting possibilities. White squeezes the defensive forces and secures a spatial advantage, and plans to undermine the queenside pawn-mass by a4 and keep his active options on the kingside alive.

13...♘a5?

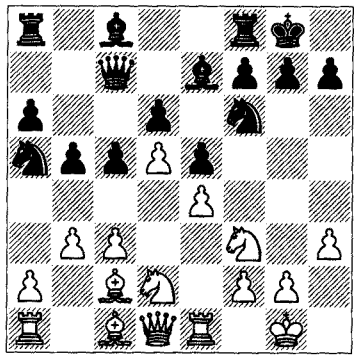
Today we know that the knight is vulnerable on a5. Later experience advised Black to stick to the more modest 13...♘d8.

14 b3 *(D)*

The first detail of a far-reaching plan. White understands well that his chances lie on the kingside, but before

he starts an attack, he must take steps to thwart Black's counterplay on the queenside. The previously popular 14 ♘f1 allows Black to improve the position of his knight by 14...♘c4.

B



14...♗d7 15 ♘f1 ♘b7 16 ♘g3 c4?!

Opening the g1-a7 diagonal plays into White's hands, all the more so because it facilitates the blockade of the queenside. It is true that 16...a5 weakens the point b5, but the waiting move 16...♖fb8 looks sounder.

17 b4 ♖fc8

Black plans ...a5, ...axb4 and ...c3, and refuses to weaken his kingside by 17...g6. Nevertheless, the pressure on his kingside will mount all the same. Having blocked the queenside, White has freed his hands for kingside play.

18 ♘f5 ♗f8 19 ♘h2

The knights prosper in closed positions. This manoeuvre, typical in the Chigorin Variation, frees the f-pawn and has ideas of ♘g4, opening the way for major pieces to penetrate on the kingside.

19...a5 20 ♖e3

Of course, White does not react to the provocation: the b7-knight is kept out of play.

20...axb4 21 cxb4 ♗xf5

21...♘e8 could hardly be considered more promising.

22 exf5 c3

The passed pawn is blockaded, and can only expect trouble. Black would certainly refrain from this advance if he had some active alternative.

23 ♘g4 ♗e7 24 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 25 ♖e4!

Obvious but strong. The rook blockades the e-pawn and will be well-placed on the fourth rank, preparing an eventual kingside pawn advance.

25...♕d7 26 ♕f3 ♖c7 27 h4 ♕e7

White was threatening 28 g4.

28 g3 ♘d8 29 a3

White frees his queen's rook from its defensive duty and makes possible the manoeuvre ♖b1-b3, which will put the black c-pawn in grave danger.

29...♖cc8?!

Black misses the point of White's previous move. One would expect 29...♖ac8.

30 ♖b1 ♖c7 31 ♕e2 ♖b8 32 ♖b3 ♕d7 33 ♕f3 ♗e7 34 ♖e3 ♗f6 35 ♖e4 ♗e7 36 g4

By combining pressure on c3 and b5, White has managed to prepare the final pawn assault on the black king.

36...f6

36...♗xh4 would obviously fail to 37 g5, while the c3-pawn is defenceless. Black has been outplayed.

37 ♖e3 ♘f7 38 ♖bxc3 ♖bc8 39 ♗e4 ♗d8 40 ♗d2 ♖c4 41 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 42 ♖c3 ♗b6 43 ♖xc4 bxc4 44 g5 fxg5

45 hxg5 ♗d8 46 ♕h5 c3 47 ♗e3 h6 48 f6 1-0

Karpov – Unzicker

Olympiad, Nice 1974
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♘a5 10 ♗c2 c5 11 d4 ♕c7 12 ♘bd2 ♘c6 13 d5

For a long time before this game was played, 13 dxe5 was popular, but in the end it failed to satisfy White's aspirations. Blocking the centre had been considered inadequate, but the time had come to explore it more deeply. Karpov, with his fine sense for space, was the proper man to tackle it.

13...♘d8

As we saw, at a5 the knight has no future and so Black turned to an old alternative. Foreseeing White's kingside play, Black moves his forces to the same side; the knight retreats to d8 whence it can reach f7 and take part in the defence of the kingside.

14 a4

The purpose of this undermining move is not only to win the open file, but first and foremost to neutralize any activity on the queenside, creating the right preconditions for kingside play.

14...♖b8 15 axb5

White could postpone the exchange by 15 b4, but he correctly assessed that he could seize the open file before Black could disentangle his back rank and oppose the a1-rook. Besides, he probably wished to exclude ...a5 at some point.

15...axb5 16 b4 ♘b7

If Black resolves the tension by 16...c4, then White's strategic goal is achieved and he can concentrate on his kingside activity. Karpov-Spassky, USSR Ch, Moscow 1973 then continued 17 ♘f1 ♘e8 18 ♘3h2 f6 19 f4 ♘f7 20 ♘f3 g6 21 f5 with enduring pressure. Unzicker's decision not to block the queenside is principled, but on b7 the knight has no prospects and Black's difficulties continue.

17 ♘f1 ♗d7 18 ♗e3 ♖a8 19 ♕d2 ♖fc8 20 ♗d3 g6 21 ♘g3

This time the f5-square is out of the knight's reach, but it is useful to prevent 21...♘h5 and keep in check ...f5.

21...♗f8

21...♘e8 looks to me more natural.

22 ♖a2

The command of the open file is essential in this closed position. With this in mind 22 ♕b2 followed by 23 ♖a3 was more precise.

22...c4?!

Black should play 22...♖xa2 23 ♕xa2 cxb4 24 cxb4 ♕c3 25 ♕b1 ♕a3 with better chances than in the game, although the b5-pawn remains lastingly vulnerable and the b7-knight passive.

23 ♗b1

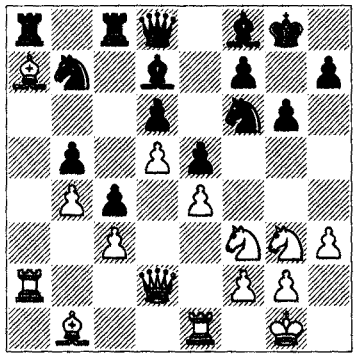
After 23 ♗f1 White could not control his opponent's counterplay based on ...f5.

23...♕d8

In case of 23...♖xa2 24 ♕xa2 ♕d8 25 ♕a6 White keeps control of the open file. The text-move prepares to snatch it and Black must have felt confident.

24 ♗a7! *(D)*

B



Deep and beautiful! By temporarily closing the file, White makes sure he can open it at will after regrouping his pieces and so keep control of it.

24...♘e8

Black cannot get rid of the blockader at a7 by 24...♕c7, since 25 ♖a6 enables White to fortify it by 26 ♕a2.

25 ♗c2 ♘c7?!

Black assessed 25...♘g7 26 ♖ea1 f5 as risky due to 27 exf5 gxf5 28 ♘g5, which is true, but does passive waiting improve his chances?

26 ♖ea1 ♕e7 27 ♗b1 ♗e8 28 ♘e2 ♘d8 29 ♘h2

Now we see that controlling the open a-file was not White's only aim. He now opens a second front: by playing f4 he will transfer the weight of the action to the kingside.

29...♗g7 30 f4 f6

This is consistent with the passive defence to which Black has resorted, and was probably prompted by the fact that 30...exf4 cedes the central d4-square to the white knights.

31 f5 g5

Black will not be able to maintain the blockade of the kingside and further waiting was a better policy.

32 ♗c2 ♗f7 33 ♘g3 ♘b7?!

33...h5 seems indispensable.

34 ♗d1 h6

34...♕e8 is somewhat better, but after 35 ♗f3 h5 36 ♕d1 White will eventually break through anyway either via h5 or down the open file. No defence is visible.

35 ♗h5 ♕e8 36 ♕d1 ♘d8 37 ♖a3 ♔f8 38 ♖1a2 ♔g8 39 ♘g4 ♔f8 40 ♘e3 ♔g8 41 ♗xf7+ ♘xf7 42 ♕h5 ♘d8 43 ♕g6 ♔f8 44 ♘h5 1-0

In all these games we have seen Black building the defensive formation c5-d6-e5, which by its position on the board and the nature of its structure directs the activity of both players towards the wings. Game after game we saw the same crystal-clear method of play, based on two actions: the first, designed to balk or neutralize Black's counterplay on one wing and the second, launching an attack on the enemy king at a moment when the other sectors of the board have been stabilized. In the process we learnt that the central defensive wall is not as durable as it looks. It is immobile and rarely enables Black to create effective counterplay, and it did not protect him against wing attacks. Even worse, the pawn-wall itself sometimes became the target of the undermining moves b4 and f4.

Decades after these games were played we can add little to these natural concepts or the efficient execution

of strategic plans, demonstrating the shortcomings of the defence. No wonder that, although defensive measures were raised to a higher level, this type of centre was slowly abandoned in favour of more active set-ups. As early as the 1950s more active defences started to come into fashion, pushing into the background such immobile pawn-structures.

Having scrutinized hundreds of relevant games played in the second half of the 20th century, I noticed two trends. One is marginal: the quiet and stubborn search for improvements in positions that are losing popularity. The second can be considered the general trend of the period: an insistence on more mobile pawn-formations. Black would usually save a tempo by playing either ...c5 or ...e5, rather than both, and use this tempo to create counterplay. This gave rise to play and counterplay on different wings, and led to more complex games, requiring new sensitivity for the dynamic process. Rather than constant and predictable plans, play became more fluid, while attention to the diversity and precision of move-orders, tactical detail and the initiative grew incomparably. The chess master of the Post-War period had to learn new lessons and we saw these tasks tackled in the important tournaments of the 1950s (such as the Mar del Plata tournaments, the Soviet championships and the candidates tournaments, to mention but a few). The many lines of the King's Indian characterized by the blocked centre were intensely explored all through the second half of the 20th century and are characteristic of the whole process. I would like now to turn the reader's attention to a selection of relevant games, offering lessons on which we can base our judgement.

Timman – Tal
Tallinn 1973
King's Indian/Benoni

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 ♘c3 ♗g7 5 e4 d6 6 ♘f3 0-0 7 ♗e2 e5

Black resorts to a central pawn-formation whose shortcomings we have seen in a number of previous games, but Tal believes he can use this move-order and improve the record.

8 0-0

It is clear that having blocked the centre Black intends to move his king's knight and play ...f5. 8 ♗g5 would stop him from doing so, but 8...h6 9 ♗h4 g5 10 ♗g3 ♘h5 11 ♘d2 ♘f4 12 0-0 ♘xe2+ (otherwise the obvious 13 ♗g4 follows) 13 ♕xe2 ♘d7, planning to move the queen's knight to f4 via f8 and g6, as Ivkov used to play in those days, offers counterplay. In my opinion 8 ♗g5 h6 9 ♗d2 is more difficult to meet.

8...♘e8

In the King's Indian Defence, Black's chances lie on the kingside and he takes immediate steps to create the right conditions for the standard pawn advance.

9 ♘e1

In case of 9 a3 Black would play 9...f5 at once, when 10 exf5 gxf5 11 ♘g5 would be parried by 11...♘c7.

9...♘d7

We learnt earlier that the central pawn set-up c5-d6-e5 is sensitive to side-blows. After the expected 10 ♘d3 the danger of f4 will be imminent and in order to meet White's intentions, Black's queen's knight is best placed at d7.

10 ♘d3 f5 11 f4 ♕e7

When the vulnerable point e5 is well protected, the move f4 fails to produce the desired effect. The queen move increases the pressure on White's pawn-centre and provokes simplifications.

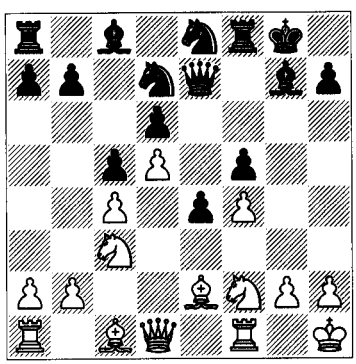
12 exf5 gxf5 13 ♔h1

In case of the blockade by 13...e4 White hopes he will be able to open the kingside by a later g4 and so removes the king from the g-file. This was a somewhat optimistic assessment and 13 ♕c2 looks to me more realistic.

13...e4 14 ♘f2?! *(D)*

Carried away by his own plans, White overlooks the consequences of Black's next move. Correct was 14 ♘e1, with ♘c2-e3 in mind.

B



14...♗xc3!

This is one of those occasions when Black's pride and joy, his fianchettoed bishop, can be favourably exchanged. Given the closed pawn-structure, the black knights are superior to the white bishops. Besides, we now see that the f2-knight is stranded in the wrong place.

15 bxc3 ♘df6 16 ♗e3 ♔h8 17 h3?

White remains consistent in his aspirations, but the course of the game will deny them. The weakness created at g3 cripples his defences. It was time for White to give up his unrealistic ambitions, and 17 ♕d2 offered more hope.

17...♖g8 18 ♕d2

18 g4 would fail to 18...fxg4 19 hxg4 ♘xg4, while if this advance is supported by 18 ♖g1, then there is 18...♘g4.

18...♘g7

Attracted by the hole on g3, the knight moves to the foreseen destination at h5. Black has seized the initiative.

19 ♘d1 ♘gh5 20 ♗xh5

20 ♗f2 is best met by the simple 20...♗d7.

20...♘xh5 21 ♗f2 ♗d7 22 ♗e1

22 ♖b1 is better.

22...♖af8 23 ♘e3 ♕f6 24 ♔h2

This makes it possible for White to play 25 g3, but he will soon find out that this move does not strengthen his defensive options. 24 ♖b1 was still possible, and in case of 24...♕h6 25 ♕f2 ♘g3+, 26 ♕xg3 ♖xg3 27 ♗xg3 should be considered.

24...♕h6 25 g3 ♖f6 26 ♖g1 ♖fg6 27 ♖g2 ♘xf4!

This does the trick. Black's concentration of superior forces will prevail.

28 gxf4 ♕xf4+ 29 ♔g1 ♕f3 30 ♕f2 ♕xh3 31 ♖b1 f4 32 ♖b2 f3 0-1

Yusupov – Kasparov

World Cup, Barcelona 1989
King's Indian Defence

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 d4 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 d5 a5

As far as I remember it was Leonid Stein's idea to undertake preventive measures against White's quick pawn expansion on the queenside before seeking counterplay on the kingside. It is always a difficult decision whether to play any moves in the sector of the board where the opponent's chances lie; there is always the critical question of how much time to invest in each of these without hurting our own chances. Experience teaches us to see to it that a delicate balance is kept all the time.

8 ♗g5

The blockading strategy with 7 d5 was advocated by Tigran Petrosian, who always followed up with this pin aimed at thwarting Black's kingside play.

8...h6 9 ♗h4 ♘a6 10 ♘d2 ♕e8

This is how Stein proposed to solve the sensitive issue: having restrained White's queenside activity for some time, Black steps out of the pin (note that the a6-knight, defending the c7-pawn against ♘b5, plays a part in it). The f6-knight will be able to move aside and ...f5 will finally be carried out.

At this point I am attracted by the alternative 10...h5. Then 11 ♗g5 ♕e8 12 a3 ♗d7 13 b3 ♘h7 14 ♗e3 h4 15 ♕c2 f5 16 f3 ♗f6 fully satisfied Black in Lerner-Uhlmann, East Berlin 1989.

11 0-0

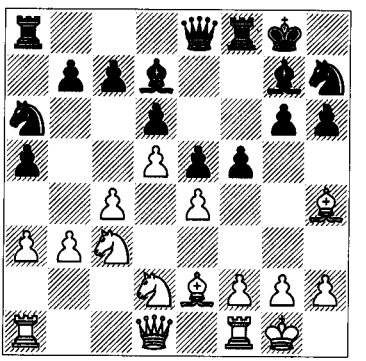
It is far from clear whether White should start immediate preparations on the queenside by 11 a3 or invest a tempo in this natural move.

11...♘h7

Opening the c-file by 11...c6 proves slow after 12 a3 cxd5 13 cxd5 ♖b8 14 b4.

12 a3 ♗d7 13 b3 f5 *(D)*

Stein used to play 13...h5 14 f3 ♗h6, but instead of 15 ♗f2 ♕e7, followed by ...h4 and ...f5, more difficulties are caused by 15 ♖b1 ♗e3+ 16 ♔h1, when the further role of the dark-squared bishop in the middle of the board is unclear. Note that 16...f5 would be answered by 17 exf5 gxf5 18 f4.



14 exf5 gxf5

14...♗xf5 is also possible and adequate, but Kasparov had prepared a

sharper continuation involving a material sacrifice.

15 ♗h5 ♕c8 16 ♗e7 ♖e8 17 ♗xe8 ♕xe8 18 ♗h4 e4 19 ♕c2

White has come out of the complications an exchange up, but Black's pieces are well posted and active. The text-move, by giving up control of the h5-square, allows Black to activate his forces rapidly, but 19 ♖c1 ♘c5 is good for Black.

19...♕h5 20 ♗g3 ♖f8 21 ♗f4?

A serious error of judgement. To confront Black's initiative 21 f4 was called for, with unclear play. The text-move leads to further exposure of the white king.

21...♕g4 22 g3 ♘g5 23 ♔h1 ♘f3 24 ♖ac1 ♘c5

All of a sudden the black pieces invade White's camp.

25 ♘xf3

To 25 ♕d1 Black responds 25...♘d3 26 ♖c2 ♘fe1 27 f3 ♕h3.

25...♕xf3+ 26 ♔g1 ♘d3 27 ♕d2

Although not quite what one would desire, 27 ♕e2 is better. The king is in grave danger as long as the black queen is alive.

27...♗d4!

Of course, retaking the exchange would squander all the latent energy.

28 ♖c2

Black's last move prevents 28 ♘e2 and it is too late for 28 ♕e2 due to 28...♘xf4 29 ♕xf3 ♘h3+ 30 ♔g2 exf3+ 31 ♔xh3 f4+, etc. Of course, 28 ♗e3 loses to 28...f4.

28...♔h7 29 h3 ♖g8 30 ♔h2 ♕h5!

Decisive! Now 31...♘xf4 with all its brutal consequences cannot be averted.

31 ♘d1 ♘e5

31...♘xf4 wins more simply (32 gxf4 ♕g6 or 32 ♕xf4 ♗e5, etc.).

32 f3 ♘d3?

Time-trouble starts to have a damaging effect on an instructively played wing attack. 32...♕xf3 33 ♗xe5 ♕xf1 34 ♗xd4 f4 35 g4 ♗xg4 36 hxg4 ♖xg4 wins.

33 ♘e3?

Had White instead continued 33 fxe4 the situation would have changed drastically. But time-trouble continues its devastating effect on the game.

33...♘xf4 34 gxf4 ♗b6??

34...♕h4 still wins for Black (35 ♕xd4 ♖g3).

35 ♕f2 ♕g6 36 ♖e2 ♗c5?

36...♖e8 keeps the game unclear.

37 fxe4 fxe4 38 f5 ♕h5 39 ♖d2 ♖g5 40 ♕f4 ♕e8 41 ♘g4 1-0

We owe the shocking end to the lack of time, but we cannot overlook the enterprising spirit of Tal's and Kasparov's play. However, blocking the centre with d5 is more characteristic of some other King's Indian variations, most notably the Sämisch.

Chernin – Uhlmann

Dortmund 1991

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♗e3 e5 7 d5

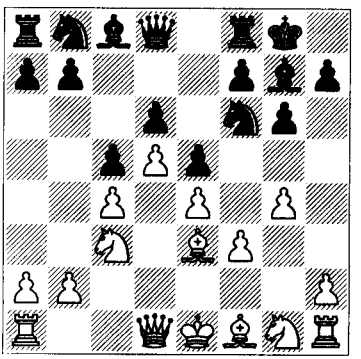
In the early days of the variation this early blockade was an open announcement of the things to come: White would castle queenside and launch a kingside pawn-storm. Although White broadened his options

in the course of time, the relative security of his king on the queenside and the prospects of attack on the other side of the board have retained a strong allure for White.

7...c5

In the wake of a series of unsuccessful attempts in the 1950s, this was considered refuted, but half a century later all assessments are put on trial and tested anew.

8 g4 *(D)*



8...h5!?

In Tal-Boleslavsky, USSR Ch, Riga 1958, Black was equally aware of the looming danger in case he tried to defend passively and Boleslavsky replied bravely 8...♘e8 9 h4 f5. After 10 exf5 gxf5 11 gxf5 ♗xf5 12 ♗d3 he was at a crossroads. The exchange of the light-squared bishops would spell disaster due to White's dominance of the important central e4-square, so Boleslavsky did his best under the circumstances: he continued 12...e4 to open the diagonal to the g7-bishop and gain control of the potentially strong e5-square. However, the subsequent analysis proved that was not enough after 13 fxe4: 13...♗c8 14 e5! ♗xe5 15 ♘f3 and White seizes the initiative, while 13...♕e7 14 exf5 ♕xe3+ 15 ♕e2 ♕g3+ 16 ♔d2 promises only difficult times ahead for Black. The variation was put into the archives. Decades later, Grandmaster Uhlmann resorted to this energetic measure, well-known in a similar position of the Sämisch, but here, at first glance, looking out of place and highly risky.

9 h3

Naturally, White refuses to block the kingside, and instead keeps the tension until his development is finished. He hopes then to resume active operations on the kingside.

9...♘e8 10 ♕d2 ♘d7 11 ♗d3

The alternative to consider is 11 0-0-0 at once, threatening 12 gxh5 now that the check from h4 is no longer available.

11...a6 12 ♘ge2 ♘df6 13 ♗g5

13 ♘g3 would be met by 13...h4 14 ♘ge2 ♘h7. Therefore the preparatory text-move.

13...♕c7

Black is not willing to cede and take on g4.

14 ♗h4

After the possible 14 ♘g3, Uhlmann had in mind 14...♘h7!? 15 gxh5 ♘xg5 16 ♕xg5 ♔h7.

14...♔h7 15 0-0-0

Everything seemed ready for 15 ♘g3 but Black would have met it by 15...♖h8 16 gxh5 ♔g8.

The text-move presents Black with a tempo to stabilize the defence, but

the apparently lethal 15 f4 exf4 16 ♘xf4 is parried by 16...hxg4 17 hxg4 ♔g8, when it is far from simple to organize an attack on the open file.

15...♖h8 16 ♖df1

After all his preparations White should finally play 16 ♘g3. The text-move proves to be a loss of time.

16...♔g8 17 ♘g3 b5

By offering a pawn on the other side of the board, Black hopes to alleviate the pressure on his kingside.

18 ♗g5

Of course, White refuses to open files on the queenside.

18...bxc4 19 ♗xc4 ♖b8

In order to stabilize the kingside, which remains in a critical state, the alternative 19...h4 20 ♘ge2 ♘d7 seems stronger.

20 gxh5 ♘xh5 21 ♘xh5 ♖xh5 22 h4 ♖b4?!

This move chases the bishop where it wants to go and so helps White to engineer his breakthrough. 22...♘f6 would take better care of the critical h5-square.

23 ♗e2 ♖h7 24 ♖fg1 ♔f8 25 h5!

The sacrifice is temporary; the gains, White hopes, could be durable.

25...gxh5 26 ♖g2 f6?

At the critical moment of the struggle Black is preoccupied more with material than with the dangers threatening his king. In my opinion 26...h4 was stronger at once. For instance: 27 ♖xh4 ♖xh4 28 ♗xh4 f5, 27 ♗xh4 ♗f6 or 27 f4 h3.

27 ♗e3 h4 28 f4 h3 29 f5

Thanks to the g1-square being protected and with Black's light-squared bishop now shut in, White will regain the pawn in favourable circumstances. His advantage is now clear.

29...♖d4 30 ♕e1 ♖xe4

A desperate tactical attempt. However, it is true that the position after 30...♗h6 31 ♖xh3 ♗xe3+ 32 ♖xe3 would be difficult for Black to hold. The penetration of the white rooks will be facilitated by the weakness of the a6-pawn and the stranded rook at d4.

31 ♘xe4 ♗xf5 32 ♖g4 ♕f7 33 ♘c3 ♗xg4 34 ♗xg4 f5 35 ♗xh3

35 ♗xf5 also works.

35...f4 36 ♗e6

36 ♗d2 would stop Black advancing any further.

36...♖xh1 37 ♕xh1 ♕g6 38 ♗f2 ♘f6 39 ♗h4 ♗h6 40 ♗xf6??

Time-trouble at its worst. Wishing to land his knight on the winning e4-square, White enters a lost position, but the miracles continue...

40...f3+ 41 ♔d1 ♕xf6??

41...♕d3+ is obviously winning for Black.

42 ♕h3 1-0

We have seen how Tal, Kasparov and Uhlmann came up with daring new ideas to defend some positions featuring a central pawn blockade which had been considered passive or outright suspect for a long time. Their efforts broadened our views and demanded a re-evaluation. We encounter similar innovations in some other lines as well, but the major effort of investigation was directed towards more active pawn-structures.

Ki. Georgiev – Uhlmann
Dortmund 1991
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♗e3 e5 7 d5 ♘h5

When it became apparent that 7...c5, preventing a later breakthrough on the c-file and any quick pawn advance on the queenside, was a risky investment of an important tempo, Black looked for other plans. The text-move, preparing an immediate ...f5, immediately attracted attention and remained popular throughout the second half of the 20th century.

8 ♕d2 f5 9 0-0-0 ♘d7

In the 1950s, 9...f4 was popular. In those days it looked to me a logical choice, but we continue to learn about chess as long as we live. Today I understand that blocking the kingside is inconsistent with the basic idea of the variation. Black's theatre of action is the kingside. Blocking it means losing counterplay essential to offset White's inevitable build-up on the queenside. 10 ♗f2 ♗f6 11 ♘ge2 (11 ♕e1 ♗e7 12 g4 ♘g7 13 h4 ♘d7 14 ♘ge2 h6 15 ♔b1 c5 does not impress; then 16 a3 a6 17 ♘c1 ♘e8 18 ♗d3 b5 eventually worked out in Black's favour in Ivanchuk-M.Gurevich, Linares 1991) 11...♗h4 12 ♗g1 and now:

a) 12...g5 failed in Petrosian-Gligorić, Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953 to 13 c5, etc.

b) At first glance 12...b6 seems to give Black an impenetrable fortress, but it turns out that against a slow but efficient build-up on the queenside Black can only wait passively: the plan of ♔b1, ♘c1-d3, a3 and finally b4 leads to small but lasting advantage for White.

c) I would prefer 12...♘d7 13 ♔b1 ♗e7 14 ♘c1 ♘hf6 15 g3 c5 as in the game M.Gurevich-P.H.Nielsen, Tåstrup 1992, which offers Black better practical chances.

10 ♗d3

Not fearing 10...f4, White can afford to wait and strengthen the point e4. If he opts for 10 exf5 gxf5 11 ♗d3 ♘c5 12 ♗c2 then 12...♕h4 provokes 13 b3 causing some discomfort on the h8-a1 diagonal. Although the immediate 13...e4 is refuted by 14 ♗g5 ♗xc3 15 ♗xh4 ♗xd2+ 16 ♔xd2 ♘f4 17 ♘h3, the position after the quiet move 13...♕e7 is double-edged.

10...♘df6

10...♘c5 11 ♗c2 a6 12 ♘ge2 b5 is a more energetic but risky attempt. 13 b4 ♘d7 14 cxb5 axb5 15 ♘xb5 ♖xa2 16 ♘ec3 ♖a8 17 ♔b2 ♘df6 18 ♘a7 favours White.

11 exf5 gxf5 12 ♘ge2 ♔h8

This is a useful move, and not only in view of the potential opening of the g-file. As long as the king is on g8, White can play 13 ♘g3 not worrying about 13...f4, because then, as Botvinnik demonstrated, 14 ♘xh5 fxe3 15 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 16 ♕c2 gives White the better chances: he dominates the important central e4-square, while his knight and bishop are superior to Black's bishop-pair. The text-move makes the breakthrough on the wing more difficult to realize.

13 ♗g5 ♕e8 14 ♖he1

The question is how to organize kingside play. A long time ago, Efim Geller thought that the slow build-up based on g3, h3 and g4 was the most realistic. Georgiev has in mind another possibility.

14...♗d7

14...♕f7 comes into consideration.

15 ♘d4 ♕c8 16 ♘c2 a6 17 ♔b1 ♖b8 18 c5

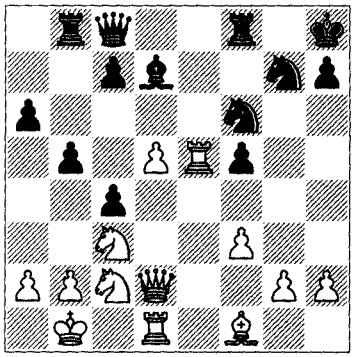
Black was ready to play ...b5 and strong steps had to be taken against it.

18...dxc5 19 ♖xe5 b5

Just in time: 20 ♘e3 would now fail to 20...♘g8.

20 ♗h6 c4 21 ♗xg7+ ♘xg7 22 ♗f1 *(D)*

B



22...b4?

Black's counterplay is enough to maintain the balance, but at the critical moment he oversteps the mark. He erroneously chooses to expand further, rather than concentrating on defensive measures (e.g., activating the queen's rook by 22...♖b6 and 23...♖d6).

In choosing 22...b4 Black suffers from the illusion that he is attacking. The queenside push is only supported by a single rook and its negative sides will soon be revealed.

23 ♘e2

It is already obvious that the c3-knight has been chased to a better position.

23...c3

The unsupported pawns have advanced too far and have now come under pressure. Already, it is difficult to suggest a good alternative: 23...a5 is too slow, while 23...♗a4 would be neutralized by 24 ♘c1.

24 ♕d4 c6 25 dxc6 ♗xc6 26 b3

This simple defensive step excludes any surprises, leaving Black with an inferior pawn-structure and pieces without coordination.

26...♕c7

26...♖d8 27 ♕xd8+ ♕xd8 28 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 29 ♘ed4 ♗b7 30 ♔c1 is hopeless for Black.

27 ♕d6 ♕xd6 28 ♖xd6 ♗b5 29 ♔c1 f4?

Better was 29...♖bd8, although 30 ♖d4 is advantageous to White. This way the position falls apart.

30 ♘cd4 ♘fe8 31 ♘xb5 axb5 32 ♖d4 ♘c7 33 ♖xb4 ♘ge6 34 ♘xc3 ♖a8 35 ♗xb5 ♖g8 36 ♗f1 ♖gd8 37 ♖be4 ♖d6 38 ♗c4 ♘d4 39 ♖xf4 1-0

Karpov – Kasparov

World Ch match (game 21), Lyons 1990

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♗e3 e5 7 d5 ♘h5 8 ♕d2 f5 9 0-0-0 a6

Feeling that 9...f4 and 9...♘d7 fail to produce the desired results, Black sought more aggressive solutions. Having played 9...a6, Black is ready to open the second front on the queenside at any moment.

10 ♗d3

After 10 ♘ge2 Black seized the initiative by 10...b5 11 cxb5 axb5 12 a3 b4 13 axb4 ♘a6 14 b5 ♘b4 in Tikhonov-A.Kovaliov, Belarussian Ch 2000. 10 exf5 gxf5 11 ♘ge2 can also be met by 11...b5, when 12 ♘g3 ♘f6 13 ♗g5 b4 14 ♘b1 ♕e8 15 ♕xb4 h6 16 ♗d2 a5 17 ♕a3 ♘a6 led to a sharp, double-edged struggle in Timman-Topalov, Olympiad, Moscow 1994.

10...c5

White's 10th move prevented ...b5, but diminished his potential pressure on the d-file, and this made possible Kasparov's reply.

11 dxc6 ♘xc6 12 ♘d5 ♗e6 13 ♗b6 ♕d7 14 ♘e2 ♖ac8 15 ♔b1 ♕f7

In spite of the fact that ...c5 created weaknesses in Black's camp, it had a healing effect on his position. His weaknesses are static and potential, while his pieces have achieved real activity.

16 ♖he1

Note that the routine 16 ♘g3 can be met by 16...♘f4 17 exf5 gxf5, when 18 ♘xf4 exf4 19 ♕xf4 ♘e5 perilously opens up the fianchettoed bishop's diagonal.

16...♔h8?!

The immediate 16...♘f6 is correct, for reasons which are explained in the next note.

17 ♗c2?!

White misses his chance: this move turns out to be pointless. Black's 16th move inadvertently allowed 17 ♘g3, when 17...♘f4 could be met by 18 exf5 gxf5 (18...♗xd5 is suspicious in view of 19 fxg6 hxg6 20 cxd5 ♕xd5 21 ♗f1) 19 ♘xf4 exf4 20 ♘h5.

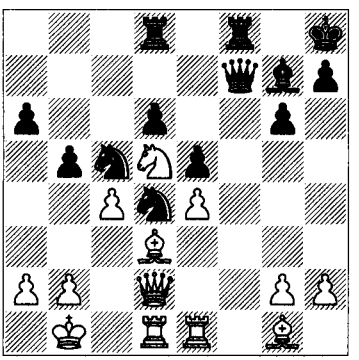
17...♘f6

The knight manoeuvre is designed to relieve Black from the stifling effect of the b6-bishop.

18 ♗d3

18 ♘xf6 ♗xf6 19 b3 would be parried by 19...♗d8.

18...♘d7 19 ♗g1 ♘c5 20 ♘b6 ♖cd8 21 ♘c3 ♘d4 22 ♘cd5 ♗xd5 23 ♘xd5 fxe4 24 fxe4 b5 *(D)*



What was planned long ago finally comes true. The loss of time caused by White's superficial 17th move had its effects on the position. Relying on his strong centralized knights, Black takes active steps. The b5-pawn is indirectly defended owing to the vulnerability of the e4-pawn.

25 ♖f1 ♕d7 26 cxb5 axb5 27 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 28 h3 ♕d8

Black intends 29...♕h4: exerting pressure on the e4-pawn is the best way to protect the b5-pawn.

29 ♗xd4

White finally decides to eliminate the strong knight, which leaves the b5-pawn weaker, but does not improve the health of the e4-pawn.

29...exd4 30 ♕e2 ♕h4 31 ♖f1 ♖e8

Quick material gains by 31...♖xf1+ 32 ♕xf1 ♘xd3 33 ♕xd3 ♕e1+ 34 ♔c2 ♕f2+ 35 ♔b3 ♕xg2 do not pay: after 36 ♘c7 b4 37 ♘d5, the b4-pawn is doomed and the a2-pawn will run down the file unimpeded.

32 ♖f4 ♕g5 33 a3

Grabbing the pawn by 33 ♗xb5 would fail against 33...d3 followed by 34...♖b8.

33...h5 34 ♔a2 b4?!

This risky move leads to some trouble. 34...♘xe4 simplifies to a draw, but the tension could be maintained by 34...♖e5.

35 axb4 ♖a8+ 36 ♔b1 ♘b3 37 ♔c2 ♘a1+ 38 ♔b1 ♘b3 39 ♕f2 ♕d8 40 ♖f7

In case of 40 ♗c4 Kasparov proposed 40...♖a1+ 41 ♔c2 ♘c1 with unclear consequences.

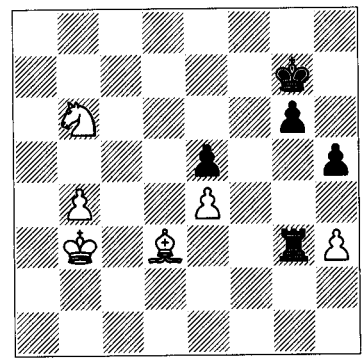
40...♕e8 41 b5

White seeks security by closing the roads leading to his king. Kasparov intended to parry the sharp 41 ♘e7 with 41...♖a1+ 42 ♔c2 ♘c5 43 ♘xg6+ ♔h7 44 ♘f8+ ♔h8 (if 44...♔g8 then 45 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 46 ♕xd4+).

41...♖a1+ 42 ♔c2 ♘c5 43 ♖xg7 ♔xg7 44 ♕xd4+ ♕e5 45 ♕xe5+ dxe5 46 b6 ♖g1 47 ♘e3 ♖e1 48 ♘c4 ♖g1 49 ♘e3 ♖e1 50 ♘c4

To 50 ♔d2 Black replies 50...♖a1 51 b4 ♖a2+ 52 ♔c3 ♘d7.

50...♖g1 51 b4 ♖xg2+ 52 ♔c3 ♘a4+ 53 ♔b3 ♘xb6 54 ♘xb6 ♖g3 *(D)*



55 ♔c3

I.Zaitsev analysed 55 ♔c4 ♖xh3 56 ♘d7 h4 57 ♘xe5 ♖e3! 58 b5 h3 in *Informator*. Now he continued 59 b6 h2 60 b7 h1♕ 61 b8♕ ♖xe4+, but White can instead play 59 ♘g4 ♖g3 60 ♘f2 h2 (or 60...♖f3 61 ♘h1) 61 e5 keeping the critical h1-square under control. In case of 55 ♔c4 Black would reply 55...g5 56 ♘d7 g4 57 hxg4 (if 57 h4 then 57...♖e3) 57...h4. White, therefore, needs the c4-square for the knight.

55...♖xh3

In case of 55...g5 now, there is 56 ♘c4 g4 57 h4 ♖g1 58 b5 g3 59 ♘e3 g2 60 ♘xg2 ♖xg2 61 b6 ♖g6 62 b7 ♖b6 63 ♗a6 followed by ♔c4-c5, etc. If Black opts for 55...♔f6, then again the knight will need the c4-square – 56 ♘c4 ♔e6 57 b5 ♖xh3 58 b6 ♔d7 59 ♘xe5+ ♔c8 60 ♔b4, etc.

56 b5

This makes Black's defence easier. Better was 56 ♘d7.

56...h4 57 ♘c4 ♖xd3+ 58 ♔xd3 h3 59 b6 h2 60 b7 h1♕ 61 b8♕ ♕f1+ 62 ♔c3 ♕c1+ 63 ♔b3 ♕d1+ 64 ♔a2 ♕a4+ 65 ♘a3 ♕xe4 66 ♕c7+ ♔h6 67 ♘c4 ♕d5 68 ♔b2 e4 69 ♕f4+ ♔g7 70 ♔c3 ♕d3+ 71 ♔b4 ♕d4 72 ♕h4 ♔f7 73 ♔b5 ♕d5+ 74 ♔b4 ♕d4 75 ♕h7+ ♕g7 76 ♕h1 ♕d4 77 ♕h4 ♔g8 78 ♕f4 ♔g7 79 ♕c1 ♔f6 80 ♔b5 ♕d5+ 81 ♔b4 ♕d4 82 ♔b5 ♕d5+ 83 ♔b6 ♕d4+ 84 ♔c6 ♔e6 85 ♘e3 ♕a4+ 86 ♔b6 ♕b4+ ½-½

Piket – Kasparov

Amsterdam 1996

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♗e3 e5 7 ♘ge2

A cautious approach: White avoids blocking the centre for the time being so as to limit his opponent's options. 7 d5 could be met by 7...c6. Then after 8 ♘ge2 cxd5 9 cxd5 Black can resort to 9...♘e8, when 10 g4 could be met by 10...♗h6, exchanging off the passive bishop. After 10 ♕d2 f5 11 0-0-0, Black went for 11...♗d7 (he probably liked 11...♘f6 less due to 12 exf5 gxf5 13 ♗h6) 12 ♔b1 b5 13 a3 a5, seeking queenside counterplay, in Arbakov-Kupreichik, Passau 1996. An early opening of the c-file can help Black to reverse the roles and create activity on the queenside. In such cases one has to pay attention to the move-order, because apparently small differences can change the situation essentially. If, for example, 8 ♕d2, then 8...cxd5 9 cxd5 ♘e8 is a less fortunate decision due to 10 g4 f5 11 gxf5 gxf5 12 0-0-0 f4 13 ♗f2 and in spite of the partially blocked kingside White will be able to mount pressure in that sector after the exchange of the light-squared bishops by ♗h3.

7...c6 8 ♕d2 ♘bd7 9 d5 cxd5 10 cxd5 a6

In case of 10...♘b6 11 b3 ♘h5 12 g3 f5 13 ♗g2 the black knights are stranded in the wrong places, while White can castle kingside and then switch his attention to the queenside. We owe such sudden changes to the nature of the blocked centre, offering the choice of the battlefield to both sides, when the decision hinges on subtle nuances. In our position, for instance, given that ♘ge2 has already been played, 10...♘e8 again comes into consideration. After 11 g4 f5 12 gxf5 gxf5 13 0-0-0 f4 the exchange of the light-squared bishops would cost White additional tempi.

11 g4 h5

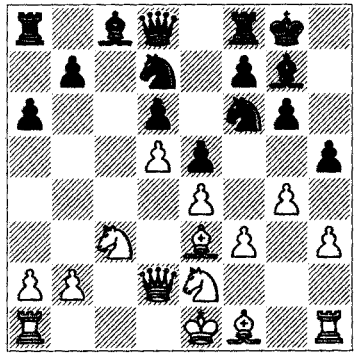
It is important to counter White's offensive. Black cannot wait for 12 ♘g3, when his activity is stifled and his chances of survival are severely reduced.

12 h3 *(D)*

12...b5

When Gligorić played this defence in the Portorož Interzonal of 1958, he opted for 12...♘h7, with 13 gxh5 ♕h4+ 14 ♗f2 ♕xh5 in mind. Neither 13 0-0-0 h4 14 ♔b1 ♗f6, as in his game against Sherwin, nor Tal's 13 h4 hxg4 14 fxg4, allowing 14...♘df6, could

B



worry Black. However, keeping the tension by 13 ♖g1 causes more difficulties. Then 13...h4 14 ♘c1 ♔h8 (if 14...b5 then 15 ♘b3 is unpleasant) 15 ♘b3 (or 15 ♘d3 f5 16 gxf5 gxf5 17 exf5 ♖xf5 18 ♘e4, Atalik-Kotronias, Ikaria 1996) 15...♗f6 16 g5 ♗e7 17 0-0-0 f6 18 gxf6 ♖xf6 19 ♗e2 is pleasant for White.

13 ♗g5 ♕a5

Doubt is cast on 13...♕e8, as played earlier, by 14 ♗h4, threatening 15 ♘g3.

14 ♘d1

White offers the exchange of queens, believing that he will be able to gain the upper hand on the queenside while keeping the kingside blocked. The consistent 14 ♘g3 was played in Kramnik-Nijboer, Groningen 1991; Black replied with 14...♘h7, when after 15 gxh5 ♘xg5 16 ♕xg5 ♗f6 he had compensation in the powerful dark-squared bishop. In case of 15 ♗e7 he was ready to enter complications by 15...♖e8 16 ♗xd6 ♕b6 17 ♗a3 ♗f6 (or 17...h4), relying on the loss of coordination among White's pieces.

14...♕xd2+

After 14...b4 15 ♘g3 ♘h7, Ivanchuk-Kasparov, Dos Hermanas 1996 ended with a repetition of moves following 16 gxh5 ♘xg5 17 ♕xg5 ♗f6 18 ♕h6 ♗g7.

15 ♔xd2 ♘c5 16 ♘f2

16 ♘g3 would parry Black's threat (16...♘xe4+) and force 16...hxg4 17 hxg4, but with the queens exchanged the open file can hardly be put to any good use.

16...♗d7 17 gxh5?

After 17 ♘g3 Kasparov had planned 17...♘h7! 18 ♗e7 h4 19 ♗xf8 ♗xf8 20 ♘e2 ♗h6+ 21 ♔e1 ♖c8, when the mighty bishops and the control of the open file represent fine compensation for the exchange.

With the text-move, White shows he is attracted to a different kind of material gain. However, it damages his pawn-structure and is rather dubious. One would expect the natural 17 ♘c1 intending 18 ♘cd3.

17...♘xh5 18 ♗e7 ♖fc8 19 ♗xd6 ♘b7 20 ♗e7 f6 21 ♘d3 ♔f7 22 ♗a3 a5

When correctly sacrificed, material is converted into initiative. Following his greedy grabbing of a pawn, White has been pushed into a dangerously passive situation.

23 b4

White cannot contemplate 23 b3 b4 24 ♗b2 ♗b5, while the text-move exposes White to harassing threats.

23...♘d6 24 ♔d1 axb4

24...♘c4 seems a more natural continuation.

25 ♗xb4 ♘c4 26 ♔c2 ♗f8

It's a good feeling to exchange an inferior bishop for its superior counterpart; the b4-bishop holds White's defence together.

27 ♘c3 ♗xb4

27...♘g3 wins an exchange, but we cannot blame Black for wanting more.

28 ♘xb4 ♖a3 29 ♘c6 ♗xc6 30 dxc6 ♖xc6 31 ♘xb5 ♖xf3 32 ♗xc4+ ♖xc4+ 33 ♔d2 ♔g7

33...♖f2+ would finish it off more quickly.

34 ♖hc1 ♖xe4 35 ♖c7+ ♔g8 36 ♖c8+ ♔h7 37 ♖c7+ ♘g7 38 ♘d6 ♖f2+ 39 ♔c3

Or 39 ♔d3 ♖d4+ 40 ♔e3 ♖fd2 41 ♘e8 f5, etc.

39...♖ee2? 0-1

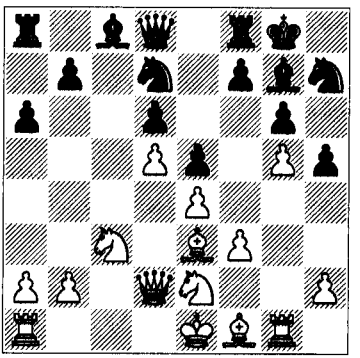
White lost on time. Black's final move, played in time-trouble, was an error that could have caused him some unpleasant moments. After 40 ♘e8 ♖c2+ 41 ♔b4 ♖xc7 42 ♘xc7 the passed a-pawn awakens. Instead, 39...♖e3+ 40 ♔b4 ♖b2+ 41 ♔a4 ♖b8 was still hopeless for White.

V.L. Ivanov – Galkin

Orel 1993

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♗e3 e5 7 ♘ge2 c6 8 ♕d2 ♘bd7 9 d5 cxd5 10 cxd5 a6 11 g4 h5 12 g5 ♘h7 13 ♖g1 *(D)*


B

The method differs, but the basic idea remains the same. White blocks the kingside, seeking to keep Black's pieces out of play and then to transfer activity to the other side of the board. If Black is provoked into 13...f6, then chances will appear on both sides. In the meantime the white king is perfectly safe behind the central pawn-mass at e1.

13...f6

Had White played 13 h4, then 13...f6 would be natural. Here 13...f6 looks somewhat impatient, although Black's unhappiness to continue the game with several of his pieces out of play is understandable. However, 13...b5 was a serious alternative. In case of 14 0-0-0, 14...f6 15 gxf6 ♖xf6 looks fine. 14 ♘c1 could be met by 14...♘b6 15 b3 ♗d7.

14 gxf6 ♖xf6 15 ♘c1 ♕e8

Of course, it is not worth Black taking the f3-pawn at the cost of losing the g-pawn. While threatening to take on f3, Black prepares 16...♘c5 and development of the queenside.

16 ♗e2 ♘c5 17 b4

The alternative to consider was 17 a4, threatening to take full control of the queenside. If blocked by 17...a5, White could continue 18 ♘b5 ♕d8 19 ♕c2 (after 19 b4 axb4 20 ♕xb4 b6 the planned manoeuvre 21 ♘b3 obviously

does not work) 19...b6 20 ♘b3 with the idea of ♘d2-c4.

17...♘a4 18 ♘xa4 ♕xa4 19 ♘d3 ♕e8

Black's queen was in a tight place (19...♗d7? loses to 20 ♘b2). Retreating to e8 keeps in check f4 and makes ...♗d7 possible.

20 0-0-0

The king was temporarily safe on e1 as well, but castling brings more coordination to his forces. Besides, sooner or later White will want to play f4.

20...♗d7 21 ♔b1 ♖c8 22 ♖c1 ♗b5 23 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 24 f4

At last White is able to carry out f4, but at the cost of weakening the e4-pawn, as highlighted by Black's reply. Unfortunately, White could not have prevented the black queen's raid by 24 ♖c1 because 24...♕h3 would then have been quite unpleasant.

24...♕c4 25 fxe5 dxe5 26 ♔b2 b6?

Happen what may, 26...♕xe4 27 ♘c5 ♕f5 was indispensable. Black overlooks a tactical stroke which should cost him dearly.

27 a4! ♕xe4

27...♗xa4 would lose to 28 ♘c5. The loss of material is unavoidable.

28 axb5 ♕xd5 29 ♘c1

This move simplifies into a won endgame, which should settle the issue.

29...♕xd2+ 30 ♗xd2 axb5 31 ♗c3 ♘f8 32 ♖g5?!

There is an ironic saying: "why do things simply, when you can complicate?" Instead of the natural move 32 ♖g2, White complicates with the weak text-move. 32 ♗xe5?! ♖f2 would also prolong the fight.

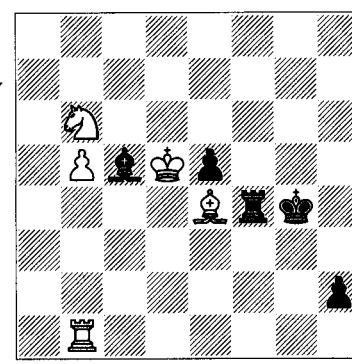
32...♖f2 33 h3 ♖h2 34 ♖g3? h4?

In time-trouble both players overlook 34...♗h6!.

35 ♖e3 ♘e6 36 ♔b1 ♘f4 37 ♗g4 ♔h7 38 ♘e2 ♘d5 39 ♖d3 ♘xc3+ 40 ♖xc3 ♗f8 41 ♖b3 ♖f2 42 ♔c2 ♖f7 43 ♘c3 ♖f2+ 44 ♘e2 ♖f7 45 ♔d3 ♖c7 46 ♗e6 ♔g7 47 ♘c3 ♖c6 48 ♗d5 ♖f6 49 ♘xb5 g5 50 ♘c7 ♔g6 51 ♔c4 g4 52 ♗e4+ ♔g5 53 ♘d5 ♖f2 54 hxg4 ♔xg4 55 ♘xb6 h3 56 b5?

Superficial play usually ends in such errors. 56 ♘d5 still wins.

56...♖f4 57 ♔d5 h2 58 ♖b1 ♗c5! *(D)*



White missed this tactical blow. Black threatens 59...♖xe4 followed by 60...♗g1.

59 ♔xc5

59 ♘d7 ♖xe4 60 ♘xc5 probably does not alter the result due to 60...♖d4+ 61 ♔xe5?! h1♕ 62 ♖xh1 ♖b4.

59...♖xe4 60 ♘c4 ♔g3 61 ♘d2

Or 61 b6 ♖h4 62 b7 ♖h8 63 ♘e3?! ♔f3.

61...♖e2 62 ♘f1+ ♔f4 63 ♘xh2 ♖xh2 64 b6 ♖h8 65 b7 ♖b8 66 ♖f1+ ♔e3 ½-½

Towards the end of the 20th century the somewhat stale atmosphere of the Sämisch was refreshed by theoretical novelties opening new horizons, but the patient work of dozens of professional players paid off as well in other branches of the King's Indian, in which the blocked centre prompted pawn movements on the wings. We shall add to our list of typical pawn actions a couple of games in the Fianchetto Variation.

Ivkov – Hübner
Wijk aan Zee 1971
King's Indian Defence

1 c4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 g3 ♘f6 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♘f3 c5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘a5

The pressure exerted by Black on the d4-pawn increases the scope of the fianchettoed bishop, which is good, but his queen's knight is pushed to the edge of the board, whence its influence on the further activity has been a matter of controversy for several decades.

9 ♘d2 e5

When White blocks the centre by playing d5 Black can respond in two ways: either preparing and carrying out a queenside pawn advance by ...a6, ...♖b8 and ...b5, or closing the centre with the text-move and directing his counterplay to his natural theatre of action – the kingside.

10 a3

When Gligorić opted for this line of play as Black in the 1950s, this is how his opponents wanted to punish him: the inevitable b4 cannot be stopped by 10...♕c7 due to 11 b4 cxb4 12 axb4 ♘xc4 13 ♘b5 ♕b6 14 ♘xc4 and the precious d6-pawn falls. It simply means that the a5-knight will have to retreat to the 'horrible' position at b7. However, it turned out that b7 was not as horrible a place for the knight as it seemed at first.

10...b6 11 b4 ♘b7

We see now that the b7-knight plays a valuable defensive role, significantly slowing White's queenside play.

12 ♗b2

12 ♖b1 is best met by 12...♘g4 (weaker is 12...♘e8 13 ♘de4 h6 14 bxc5 ♘xc5 15 ♘xc5 dxc5 16 d6 with advantage to White, Damjanović-Marović, Zagreb 1965) 13 h3 ♘h6 and if 14 ♘de4, then 14...f6. In case of 12 e4, on the contrary, correct is 12...♘e8 followed by 13...f5, whereas 12...♘g4 13 h3 ♘h6 14 ♘f3!? favours White.

12...♘g4

12...♘e8 also opens the way to the f7-pawn, but from g4 the knight can reach some desirable destinations.

13 h3 ♘h6 14 e3

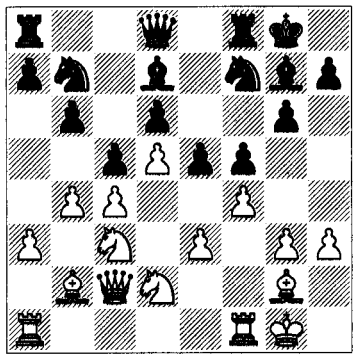
14 e4 f5 can hardly please White and he gets ready to meet ...f5 in another way.

14...♗d7 15 ♕c2 f5 16 f4 ♘f7 *(D)*

This is what Black had in mind when choosing 12...♘g4. On f7 the knight stands actively, defending the important central points e5 and d6, and ready to support ...g5.

17 ♘b3 g5!?

W



This makes all the difference: while White's pawn advance on the queenside is stuck, Black is able to seize the initiative on the other side of the board, demonstrating that 17 ♘b3 was pointless.

18 bxc5?! dxc5 19 a4

We learn now that 17 ♘b3 was played to make possible the exchange at c5 and open the b-file. I conclude that White did not expect 18...dxc5, counting on 19 d6 and only now noticed that the simple 19...♖b8, threatening 20...♘bxd6, refutes the idea. As a consequence he presented Black with the useful d6-square in a position where a strong blockader is ready to appear on it. The b3-knight failed to realize its mission and the tempi spent would have been better invested in ♘e2, ♖ae1 or ♔h2.

Seeing his error, White tries to correct it by preparing to meet 19...♘fd6 with 20 ♘b5, but Black is able to go round it.

19...exf4 20 exf4 ♘fd6 21 ♕d3?

21 ♘d1 was called for at once, getting rid of the dark-squared bishops, but White obviously hoped he could first introduce the queen's rook to the open file.

21...♖e8 22 ♖f2

White finally desists from 22 ♖ae1 because of 22...♖xe1 23 ♖xe1 gxf4 24 gxf4 ♕h4.

22...gxf4 23 ♖xf4 ♕g5 24 ♘d2

This implies a material sacrifice, after which White's position further deteriorates, but the recommended 24 ♖af1 ♖e7, planning to double the rooks on the open file, is also advantageous to Black. The pin on the long diagonal continues to harass White.

24...♗d4+

Black could win White's queen by 24...♖e3 25 ♕xe3 ♗d4, but then 26 ♘d1 ♗xe3+ 27 ♘xe3 ♕xg3 28 ♖f3 ♕h4 can be assessed as more complicated than the text.

25 ♖xd4

25 ♔h1 ♖e3 26 ♖xd4 ♖xd3 27 ♖xd3 ♖e8 (or 27...♘a5) is also inadequate for White. He therefore pins his hopes on potential threats on the a1-h8 diagonal.

25...cxd4 26 ♘d1

The exchange of queens after 26 ♕xd4 ♕e3+ does not satisfy White.

26...♖e1+ 27 ♔h2?

27 ♘f1 ♘c5 28 ♕xd4 ♔f7 demonstrates that Black is not so vulnerable on the dark diagonal as it seemed, but that is as far as White could go. The text-move causes a sudden collapse.

27...f4 28 g4 f3 29 ♗xf3 ♘f5 30 ♘f1

Or 30 ♘e4 ♕f4+ 31 ♔g2 ♘h4+ 32 ♔f2 ♘xf3 33 ♕xf3 ♖f1+, etc.

30...♕f4+ 0-1

Dizdar – Lputian
Olympiad, Erevan 1996
King's Indian Defence

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 d4 d6 6 0-0 a6 7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘a5 9 ♘d2 c5

We enter again the same position with one little difference: instead of the early ...e5 Black resorts to a quick pawn advance on the queenside. The blocked centre often offers a choice of battlefield, which in this case is justified by Black's desire to engage the a5-knight in the play.

10 ♖b1

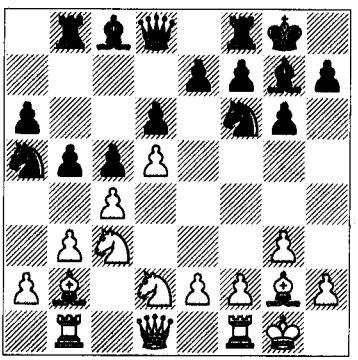
Before the match Armenia-Croatia in the penultimate round of the Olympiad Dizdar decided to test this continuation instead of the rather worn-out 10 ♕c2.

10...♖b8 11 b3

Of course, 11 a3 does not make much sense because it can be met by 11...♕c7, but 11 b4 was possible.

11...b5 12 ♗b2 *(D)*

B



12...bxc4

We expected 12...♗h6, when Dizdar was ready to sacrifice a pawn by 13 ♗a1 ♗xd2 14 ♕xd2 bxc4 15 bxc4 ♘xc4 16 ♕f4 and rely on the pressure he could exert against the weakened black kingside. In case of 12...e5, an interesting reply is 13 dxe6 fxe6 14 ♘de4 (one of the points of keeping the queen at d1; note that 14 cxb5 axb5 15 ♘de4 is ineffective owing to 15...b4), as played later in Yusupov-Kindermann, German Ch, Bremen 1998.

However, apart from these lines defining the position at an early stage, Black could resort to 12...h5, maintaining the tension and that was possibly his best option. By opening the b-file, Black actually worsens the situation of his queen's knight. The relation between the two wings is too subtle and complex to be solved by such simplistic measures.

13 bxc4 ♗h6

The continuation 13...e5 14 ♗a1 ♖xb1 15 ♘cxb1 h5 16 ♕a4 favours White. The text-move will be met by the same little tactical solution.

14 ♗a1 ♗f5 15 e4 ♗g4 16 f3 ♗e3+

The centralization of the dark-squared bishop explains the last few moves. Black's hopes were based on this manoeuvre.

17 ♔h1 ♗d7 18 ♘b3

This forces Black into exchanges leading to an inferior position.

18...♘xb3

18...♘xc4 fails to 19 ♕e2.

19 axb3 ♗d4 20 ♘e2 ♗xa1 21 ♖xa1

White's advantage consists of a more compact pawn-structure and the

chance of a breakthrough on the central e-file.

21...a5 22 ♘f4

The manoeuvre ♘f4-d3 is essential: the b4-square must be kept under control and e5 supported.

22...♕b6 23 ♖a3 ♖b7 24 ♖f2?!

While watching the game I was disappointed that Dizdar missed the logical and consistent 24 e5!? dxe5 25 ♘d3, fulfilling both tasks: preventing Black's penetration on the queenside (by ...a4 at a propitious moment or via b4) and seizing the initiative in the centre. The hesitant approach started by the text-move is too slow to bring anything palpable.

24...♖fb8 25 ♗f1 ♕c7 26 ♗d3 ♖b4 27 ♗c2 a4

So just when White thought his long manoeuvres would thwart Black's counterplay and make it possible for him to enhance the pressure on the isolated pawn, Black finds an interesting tactical solution.

28 ♘d3 axb3 29 ♘xb4 cxb4 30 ♖xb3 ♕xc4 31 ♖b1 ♕c5 32 ♖d2 ♗b5 33 ♗d3 ♘d7

The passed pawn is doomed, but the sensitive position of the white king offers enough counterplay. The active knight will do his job.

34 ♗xb5 ♕xb5 35 ♖db2 ♕c5 36 ♖c2 ♕a7 37 ♖c4 ♕a5 38 ♕b3 ♘e5 39 ♖xb4 ♖xb4 40 ♕xb4 ♕xb4 41 ♖xb4 ♘xf3 42 ♔g2 ♘e5 43 ♖b7 ♔f8 44 h3 h5 45 ♔f2 g5 46 ♔e3 ½-½

It is instructive to watch the course of these two games. Both are characterized by the central blockade, but the structures are slightly different and the various nuances influence the course of events visibly. Both White and Black create play in different sides of the board depending on the nature of the central pawn-wall. That interrelation grows even more complex and subtle in the Mar del Plata variation, summarizing the essential dynamic processes not only of the whole King's Indian, but of the closed centre in general. We shall examine it on the model of the stormy Mar del Plata line, whose vicissitudes marked the second half of the 20th century.

Taimanov – Najdorf

Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7

When he came to Zurich, Najdorf had fresh memories of the crushing defeats he and Eliskases suffered against Gligorić and Trifunović respectively at the Mar del Plata tournament, played earlier that same year. In those days, news spread slowly, and Najdorf astutely decided to use the same ideas to his advantage.

9 ♘e1

This is one of the manoeuvres which Mark Taimanov explored in the pioneer days of this system. The knight is moved to d3 to support c5 or f4. At the same time 9...♘h5 is prevented and f3 made possible as a reply to the advance of the f7-pawn.

9...♘d7

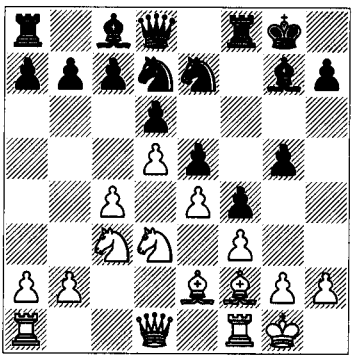
The centre is blocked and the danger of side-blows imminent. For that reason 9...♘e8 was for a long time considered inferior. However, modern practice has shown that 10 ♘d3 (if 10 f4 at once then 10...exf4 11 ♗xf4 h6 and Black is ready to expand on the kingside) 10...f5 11 f4 is not as dangerous as it was believed half a century ago. The simple 11...exf4 12 ♘xf4 fxe4 13 ♘xe4 ♘f5 14 ♔h1 ♕e7 15 ♗d3 ♗e5, as in Atalik-Nijboer, Wijk aan Zee 1997, gives level chances. What Black probably likes less is 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 f4 (following 11...c5 12 dxc6 bxc6 13 ♕d2 ♗e6 14 ♖d1, as in Shirov-Uhlmann, Bundesliga 1993/4, White's advantage is minimal) 12 ♗f2 followed by 13 c5, although his own reaction on the kingside by ...g5, ...h5, ...♖f6-g6 is also quick and his king's knight, defending c7 against White's penetration, is not sitting on e8 in vain. Nevertheless, the text-move has remained more popular and not without reason. Placed at d7, the knight hinders White's c5 advance and fortifies the point e5.

10 ♗e3

In the beginning White insisted on this move: the bishop's role is to support the pawn advance on the queenside and at e3 is posted ideally for the task. However, at e3 it is also exposed to the quick advance of the black f-pawn and White must pay a precious tempo to reach the desired position.

10...f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 ♘d3?! *(D)*

Having divided the board with a pawn-chain, White and Black have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marked out their spheres of activity: White will break through by c5, while Black will prepare ...g4. The essential question is who will be quicker. Although White's last move appears to be perfectly logical, tournament practice has shown it to be lacking. Given the fine balance between both sides' attacks, the use to which each tempo is put is especially crucial. A drawback of putting the knight on d3 is that it blocks the influence of the e2-bishop on the light diagonal f1-a6 (especially on the b5-square).

Caught by surprise, Taimanov could not discern these nuances.

13...♘f6 14 c5 ♘g6 15 ♖c1

The fact that ♘d3 has been played limits White's possibilities on the queenside, but after 15 a4 h5 the breakthrough of the g-pawn is imminent, while White is slow.

15...♖f7 16 ♖c2?!

Looking back on it, doubling rooks on the c-file looks naïve. White has reached the point when extraordinary measures are necessary. I am thinking of 16 g4.

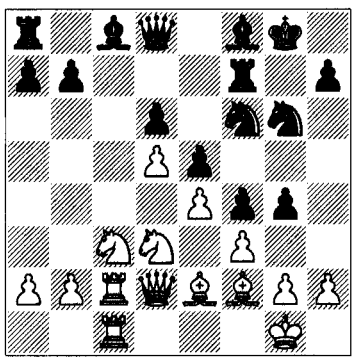
Note that 16 cxd6 cxd6 17 ♘b5 could be answered by 17...g4. The same happens after 16 ♘b5: 16...g4 works because the e4-pawn is not overprotected any more.

16...♗f8

This simple but subtle manoeuvre was conceived by Gligorić. The vulnerable points d6 and c7 are well protected, while g7 is vacated for the rook. From there it can play a double role: defending against the intrusion of the white knight and supporting the advance of the g-pawn. In comparison, White's preparations to double rooks on the c-file look slow and clumsy.

17 cxd6 cxd6 18 ♕d2 g4 19 ♖fc1 *(D)*

B



19...g3!

For the second time in the course of the game Black earns a tempo against the dark-squared bishop. This time it is at the cost of a pawn, but not in vain. Before White was ready to play ♘b5 and make further progress on the queenside, Black strikes and seizes the initiative.

20 hxg3 fxg3 21 ♗xg3 ♘h5 22 ♗h2

22 ♗f2 is not better. All of a sudden the white king is seriously exposed to attack.

22...♗e7 23 ♘b1

White avoids the worst, as he temporarily prevents 23...♗g5 in view of the reply 24 ♖xc8. However, he cannot avoid further deterioration of his position.

23...♗d7 24 ♕e1 ♗g5 25 ♘d2 ♗e3+ 26 ♔h1 ♕g5 27 ♗f1

Reluctant to sacrifice an exchange by 27 ♘c4 ♗xc1 28 ♕xc1, White opts for the inferior, passive defence.

27...♖af8 28 ♖d1 b5

Black prevents White's intended 29 ♘c4.

29 a4 a6 30 axb5 axb5 31 ♖c7 ♖g7

This was prepared many moves earlier. Everything fits well in the black mosaic.

32 ♘b3 ♘h4 33 ♖c2 ♗h3!

Black threatens 34...♖xf3 and begins the final assault.

34 ♕e2 ♘xg2 35 ♗xg2 ♗xg2+ 36 ♕xg2 ♕h4 37 ♕xg7+ ♔xg7 38 ♖g2+ ♔h8 39 ♘e1 ♘f4 40 ♖g3 ♗f2 41 ♖g4 ♕h3 42 ♘d2 h5 43 ♖g5 0-1

43...♖g8 decides the game. Black's attack was quicker. The tempi lost by the dark-squared bishop proved fatal for White.

The effect of this game coupled with the impressions from the Mar del Plata tournament was such that 13 ♘d3 was condemned as dubious and abandoned. White rested his hopes on 'more natural' continuations. 13 b4 was one of them for quite a long time.

Piket – Kasparov
Tilburg 1989
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 c4 ♗g7 4 ♘c3 0-0 5 e4 d6 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♘e1 ♘d7 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 b4

What could be more natural than to carry out c5 as soon as possible? When the c-file is opened, Black's queenside will become vulnerable. Yet the more I have been thinking of it, the less certain I am. In the end one starts to distrust the investment of a tempo into something one can achieve in a devious manner without direct preparation; we shall learn about it in the following games.

13...♘f6

In case of 13...h5 White should proceed with the intended 14 c5; weaker is 14 ♘b5 ♘f6 15 ♘xa7 ♗d7 16 ♘b5 g4. On the other hand after 13...♖f6 14 c5 ♖h6 15 cxd6 cxd6 16 ♘b5, as in Korchnoi-W.Watson, Beersheba 1987, White threatens 17 ♖c1 and the knight penetrates.

14 c5 ♘g6

14...h5 looks quick and energetic, but 15 cxd6 cxd6 16 ♖c1 slows down Black's reaction and 16...♗d7 17 ♘b5 ♗xb5 18 ♗xb5 g4 is met calmly by 19 ♔h1 g3 20 ♗g1 gxh2 21 ♗f2 with advantage, as in Malaniuk-Kaminski, Kecskemet 1989.

15 cxd6

Viktor Korchnoi has invested a lot of time and valuable ideas into this variation. After 15 a4 h5, he came up with the new try 16 c6 in Korchnoi-Xie Jun, Ladies vs Veterans, Marbella 1999. After 16...♗h6 17 b5 b6 18 a5 g4 White's pressure on the queenside was not as strong as it would be if the b5-square were vacant. Black's kingside chances matched it. Note that 16 a5 comes too late due to 16...g4 17 cxd6 cxd6 18 ♘b5 g3 19 hxg3 (or 19 ♗xa7 ♘h7) 19...fxg3 20 ♗xg3 a6 and, having dealt with the threat on the queenside, Black is ready to make use of his strong squares and turn to counter-attack on the kingside.

15...cxd6 16 ♖c1 ♖f7

Obviously ♘b5-c7 must be stopped.

17 a4

In the end, without the support of the a-pawn White will not be able to provoke weaknesses in Black's defence, but that means too much time is put into preparatory moves.

17...♗f8!

Consistent with the general defensive plan: so that Black can play ...♗d7 and meet ♘b5 with ...g4, the d6-pawn must be protected. Previously, Black had played 17...h5 18 a5 ♗d7 19 ♘b5 ♗xb5 20 ♗xb5, when Black's dangerous light-squared bishop has gone, but he has gained time for active play with his other pieces. After 20...g4 21 ♔h1 g3 22 ♗g1 gxh2 23 ♗f2, the new move 23...a6!, preventing White from playing a6 himself, was introduced in Burgess-W.Watson, British Ch, Plymouth 1989. Then:

a) 24 ♗b6?! ♕f8 25 ♗e2?! h4 gave Black good play in the game. On e2 the bishop has no prospects and in this clumsy mass of pieces it stifles active opportunities.

b) The proposed 24 ♗a4 does look better and after 24...h4 White can rely on 25 ♔xh2 ♘h5 26 ♘d3 ♘g3 27 ♖g1. For the time being the pressure on g3 delays ...h3, but then ♗e1 and ♘f2 will neutralize the counterplay on the h-file. There is also 25 ♗b6. In view of the uncertain situation on the kingside that move can be justified only if 25...♕f8 can be met by 26 ♘d3 ♘h5 27 ♖f2, planning ♖fc2 and ♘f2. The penetration on the c-file might enable White to activate the light-squared bishop via d7, as well as thwart the manoeuvre ...♗f6-d8 and prevent Black's rooks from taking part in the assault on the white king, but, of course, 27...♗f6 28 ♖fc2 h3 raises questions about his security.

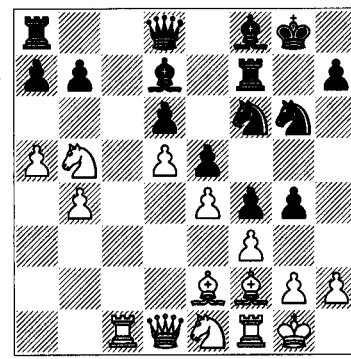
18 a5 ♗d7

18...♘e8 has also been played, but abandoning kingside plans in favour of a passive defence looks to me a betrayal, no matter what its real merit may be.

19 ♘b5

This is what White has been preparing, hoping either to penetrate further to a7 or c7 or to provoke the exchange, which would make Black's kingside attack harmless. However, the e4-pawn, up until now overprotected, has now become shaky and that makes the difference. The waiting 19 ♔h1 was suggested as the proper solution, but it is answered by another useful waiting move – 19...♖g7 and it remains questionable if the g1-square being vacant improves the game continuation ♘b5. I would rather connect ♔h1 with the follow-up 20 g3.

19...g4! *(D)*



Just in time to meet the penetration by the white pieces on the queenside. Just at this moment the long-awaited advance is possible since the e4-pawn is not protected by the knight.

20 ♘c7

20 fxg4 (strangely given an exclamation mark by Kasparov in *Informator*) 20...♘xe4 21 ♘c7 ♗a4 (weaker are 21...♖c8 22 ♘e6 and 21...♘xf2 22 ♖xf2 ♗a4 {or 22...♖c8 23 ♘e6 ♕f6 24 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 25 g5 ♕f5 26 ♗g4 ♕e4 27 ♕d2} 23 ♕xa4 ♖xc7 24 ♖xc7 ♕xc7 25 ♗d3) 22 ♕xa4 ♖xc7 is also advantageous to Black.

On 20 ♘xa7 commentators give 20...g3 21 ♗b6 ♕e7 and now 22 h3 (if 22 ♔h1 then 22...♘h5 23 ♘b5 gxh2 24 ♗f2 ♗xb5 25 ♗xb5 ♘g3+ 26 ♗xg3 fxg3) 22...♗xh3 23 gxh3 ♕d7. However, in my opinion 22 ♗b5 comes into consideration. For example: 22...gxh2+ (if 22...♘h5 then 23 ♗xd7 followed by 24 h3) 23 ♔xh2 ♗xb5 24 ♘xb5 ♘h5 25 ♘d3 ♕h4+ 26 ♔g1 ♘g3 27 ♘f2 (after 27 ♖e1

♕h1+ 28 ♔f2, 28...♕h4 leads to a repetition, but Black could ask for more by playing 28...♕h2 29 ♖g1 ♘h4 with various threats in the air, among them ...♖a6 followed by ...♖xb6) 27...♘xf1 28 ♕xf1.

20...g3

Since the 1950s this tactical solution has remained White's nightmare in numerous situations of this precarious variation.

Note that 20...♗a4 fails this time because of 21 ♕xa4 ♖xc7 22 ♖xc7 ♕xc7 23 ♕c2! ♕d7 24 fxg4 ♘xg4 25 ♗xg4 ♕xg4 26 ♘f3 (Kasparov).

21 ♘xa8?

21 hxg3 fxg3 22 ♗xg3 ♗h6 23 ♘xa8 ♘h5 24 ♗f2 ♘gf4 gives Black a strong attack, but considering what the position offers, White had to go in for it. The text-move loses material without compensation.

21...♘h5!

Again the h5-square is vital.

22 ♔h1

22 ♗xa7 fails to 22...♕h4 23 h3 ♗xh3 24 gxh3 ♕xh3 25 ♖f2 gxf2+ 26 ♔xf2 ♘h4 27 ♗f1 ♕h2+ 28 ♘g2 ♖g7 (Kasparov) and White loses material.

22...gxf2 23 ♖xf2 ♘g3+ 24 ♔g1 ♕xa8 25 ♗c4 a6

A nice final touch: Black has just prepared the pin from a7, while the knight is still taboo (26 hxg3 fxg3 27 ♖b2 ♕d8 28 ♔f1 ♕h4).

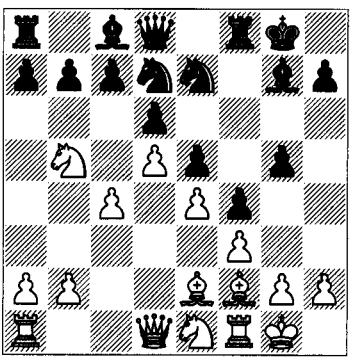
26 ♕d3 ♕a7 27 b5 axb5 28 ♗xb5 ♘h1 0-1

The game confirms what some strong players felt a long time ago: 13 b4 could not satisfy White's ambitions. Towards the end of the century the unquenchable curiosity of chessplayers revived the critical line of the Mar del Plata again. White turned to other continuations.

Korchnoi – Hulak

Interzonal tournament, Zagreb 1987
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♘e1 ♘d7 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 ♘b5 *(D)*



B

White felt all along that in order to neutralize Black's aggressive counterplay on the kingside, speedy play on the other side of the board was indispensable. Was this strange, unexpected move what he had been looking for?

13...a6?

An overdose of optimism or a greedy conclusion that the knight must sound retreat or pay in material for its impudent inroad? Whatever the case, this single game was a sufficient lesson to look for an improvement. The correct response is 13...b6 14 b4 a6,

but after 15 ♘c3 the balance remains delicate. 15...h5 16 c5 ♘f6 17 cxb6 cxb6 18 b5 a5 19 ♘a4 ♖b8 20 ♖c1 was advantageous for White in Korchnoi-Ye Jiangchuan, Olympiad, Novi Sad 1990. However, 15...♘f6 saves a tempo. D.Gurevich-Schekachev, Moscow 1992 continued 16 c5 ♖b8 17 cxb6 cxb6 18 b5 a5 19 ♖c1 ♗d7 and 20 ♘a4 was met at once by 20...g4 21 ♖c6 ♗xc6 22 bxc6 g3 23 hxg3 ♘h5 and Black seized the initiative. Note that in similar positions h5 is the knight's square and each time Black decides to play ...h5 he must weigh his decision twice (besides, sometimes the h-file may be used for attack and the advanced h-pawn is just a barrier).

14 ♘a7

White's intentions become clear. If he is able to eliminate Black's light-squared bishop, White will cripple Black's kingside counterplay.

14...♖xa7 15 ♗xa7 b6

The idea was to trap the bishop and win it. The first part is realized, but the second will prove much more difficult than Black expected.

16 b4 ♗b7

Black's last hope could be 16...♘f6, all the more so because of White's alternative solution in the next note. Unfortunately for Black, after 17 c5 g4 18 ♖c1 (or perhaps 18 fxg4 ♘xe4 19 ♗c4) 18...g3 19 cxb6, 19...gxh2+ fails to 20 ♔xh2 cxb6 21 ♖h1, while 19...cxb6 20 h3 ♗xh3 21 gxh3 ♕d7 is parried by 22 ♗xb6 ♕xh3 23 ♖f2.

17 c5

17 ♕a4 ♘c8 (or 17...♘f6 18 c5 ♕a8 19 cxb6 ♘c8 20 ♖c1 cxb6 21 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 22 ♗xb6) 18 c5 dxc5 19 ♗xa6, Züger-Agnos, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1987, also carries out the task.

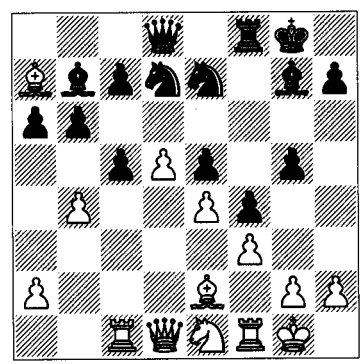
17...dxc5

17...bxc5 18 bxc5 ♕a8 19 ♗b6 cxb6 20 c6 ♘c5 21 cxb7 ♕xb7 22 a4 is not adequate for Black either.

18 ♖c1! *(D)*

After 18 bxc5 ♘xc5, 19 ♖c1 would fail to 19...♕d6.

B



After the text-move White threatens the simple 19 bxc5 ♘xc5 20 ♖xc5 bxc5 21 ♗xc5 with an obvious superiority. Black is pushed down a narrow path leading to defeat.

18...♘c8

18...cxb4 fails to 19 d6 ♘c6 20 ♗xa6 ♗xa6 21 ♖xc6 ♗xf1 22 dxc7 ♕c8 23 ♔xf1, etc.

19 bxc5 ♗a8 20 c6 ♘f6 21 ♗xb6 ♘xb6 22 ♗xa6

The bishop has finally fallen, but for a high price. The passed pawn will advance unperturbed, while the kingside counterplay, having lost the support of the light-squared bishop, is permanently grounded.

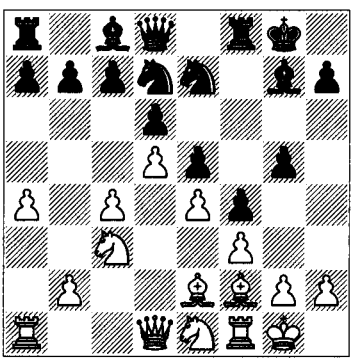
22...g4 23 ♘d3 g3 24 h3 ♘e8 25 ♘c5 ♕b8 26 a4 ♘d6 27 a5 ♘bc8 28 ♔h1 ♕a7 29 ♕c2 ♘e7 30 ♖b1 ♘g6 31 ♖fc1 ♗f6 32 ♗f1 ♗xc6 33 dxc6 ♕xa5 34 ♖a1 ♕b4 35 ♘e6 1-0

The surprise paid off, but the subsequent encounters, as noted in the annotations, soon revealed a remedy. It was again up to White to seek improvements.

Ziegler – Shulman
Gothenburg 1999
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 0-0 5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♘e1 ♘d7 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 a4 *(D)*

B



Slowly it dawned upon White that Black's seemingly devastating attack on the kingside is not so quick, if White's queenside attack is energetic and if each tempo is invested sparingly and to the point. Having concluded that the breakthrough on the c-file takes too much time and the early ♘b5 yields less than initially hoped for, a new idea was tested. The queen's rook stays on a1 and supports the advance of the a-pawn, squeezing the opponent and preparing either ♘b5 or the delayed c5 in improved circumstances. The advance has been given much thought in recent times. The idea is to engage Black in battle on the queenside, thwarting the kind of kingside attack which Najdorf carried out so comfortably against Taimanov.

13...♘g6

Kasparov was not especially happy to enter what follows in our game, and in Yusupov-Kasparov, Olympiad, Erevan 1996 opposed White's advance at once by 13...a5 14 ♘d3 b6 15 b4 axb4 16 ♘xb4 ♘f6 and kept the balance in spite of some difficulties. Then in the position after 17 ♘b5 g4 18 ♗h4 g3 19 h3, 19...♘g6 20 ♘c6 led to serious problems for Black in P.H.Nielsen-Harestad, Gausdal 1996, but 19...♗d7 is correct and strong.

14 a5 ♔h8

The advance of the a-pawn creates some direct threats, and in reply Black prepares a counter-attack on the kingside by vacating the g8-square for the rook. More often, however, we encounter 14...♖f7:

a) 15 ♘b5 is premature again due to the energetic 15...♘f6 16 ♘xa7 g4 17 ♘xc8 g3 18 hxg3 ♘h5, as pointed out by Nunn.

b) 15 c5 is a sharp and interesting idea, played by the Croatian grandmaster Kožul. After 15...♘xc5 16 ♗xc5 dxc5 17 ♗c4 ♔h8 18 a6, Black must avoid a trap – 18...b6? 19 d6 and now

19...♖d7 20 ♕d5 ♖b8? 21 dxc7 or 19...♖f8 20 ♗d5 ♖b8 21 ♘b5, but the response 18...bxa6 19 ♘d3 ♗f8 20 ♘a4 ♖g7 seems adequate.

c) 15 b4 ♗f8 16 c5 ♘f6 (if 16...dxc5 then 17 d6). Here 17 cxd6 is met by 17...♗xd6 with good play for Black, as in Korchnoi-Nunn, Amsterdam 1990. Korchnoi's 17 c6 (threatening 18 cxb7 ♗xb7 19 a6 ♗c8 20 ♘b5) seems more dangerous to me. Black should then refrain from the hasty 17...bxc6 18 dxc6 ♗e6 19 ♘d5; in that case his kingside counterplay is delayed by the exchange of the f6-knight, while White creates a far-advanced pawn-majority on the queenside, as in Pogorelov-del Rey, Saragossa 1999. Thus Black should resort to 17...♖g7 18 ♔h1 ♘h8.

15 ♘b5

If White postpones this characteristic inroad and continues 15 ♘d3 ♖g8 16 c5 ♘f6 17 cxd6 cxd6 18 ♘b5, Black is again ready to play the sharp, double-edged 18...g4, as in Chmielewski-Lybin, corr. 1995-6.

15...♘f6 16 ♘xa7 ♗d7

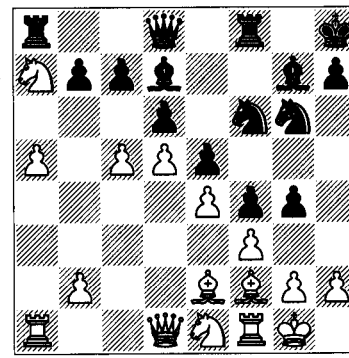
Logical, although 16...g4 also deserves attention, planning to meet 17 ♘xc8 with 17...g3 18 hxg3 ♘h5.

17 c5 g4 *(D)*

By sacrificing a pawn on the kingside, Black manages to counter the rising pressure on the queenside. Note that he carries out ...g4 without the support of the h-pawn, saving the vital h5-square for his knight.

18 c6 g3 19 hxg3 bxc6

19...fxg3 is weaker in view of 20 ♗xg3 ♖xa7 21 cxd7 ♕xd7. The black queen should stay on the d8-h4 diagonal.



20 ♘xc6

On 20 dxc6 Black can strike by 20...♘h5 (20...♗e6 is slow: 21 g4) 21 cxd7 (or 21 g4 ♘g3) 21...fxg3, while 20 gxf4 opens up the white king too much. 20 g4 came into consideration, however.

20...♗xc6 21 dxc6 ♘h5

Keeping h5 vacant often proves beneficial for Black. Owing to this move Black can attack the white king, who finds himself dangerously exposed. The clumsily positioned pieces around him are more like obstacles than effective bodyguards.

22 gxf4 exf4

Note that this is possible because the king was moved to h8.

23 ♗c4 ♘g3 24 ♗e6 ♘xf1?!

The knight is valuable on g3 and one should not impatiently exchange it, even if it wins an exchange. The intermediary 24...♕f6 would either force 25 ♗h3, when 25...♘xf1 26 ♔xf1 ♕xb2 exposes the king to ...♕b5+, while after 25 ♗xg3 fxg3 26 ♗h3,

26...♘f4 is highly annoying. For instance, 27 ♖a4 ♕h4 28 ♘d3? ♘xh3+ 29 gxh3 ♕xh3 30 ♕e2 ♗h6 and there is no defence.

25 ♔xf1 ♕f6 26 ♗c4

The consequence of the hasty exchange: the bishop remains on the active diagonal.

26...♕xb2 27 ♖a4 ♖fb8 28 a6 ♕c3 29 ♘d3

Otherwise 29...♖b2.

29...♘e5 30 a7 ♘xc4 31 axb8♕+ ♖xb8 32 ♘xf4 ♘d2+

Obviously not 32...♘b2 because of 33 ♕b1.

33 ♔g1

33 ♔e2 also runs into 33...♕xc6 (but not 33...♖b1? 34 ♕xd2 ♖b2 35 ♖a8+ ♗f8 36 ♗d4+, etc.), but the text-move is possible owing to the fact that now 33...♖b1 could be met by 34 ♖a8+ ♗f8 35 ♖xf8+ ♔g7 36 ♕xb1 ♘xb1 37 ♘e6+ followed by 38 ♘xc7.

33...♕xc6 34 ♖a1

An elegant solution.

34...♗e5

After 34...♗xa1 35 ♕xa1+ ♔g8 36 ♕f6 the situation has turned: the white king is secure and the black one exposed.

35 ♖c1 ♕xc1 36 ♕xc1 ♖b1 37 ♕xb1 ♘xb1 38 ♘d3 ♗a1 ½-½

Atalik – Gufeld
Los Angeles 1999
King's Indian Defence

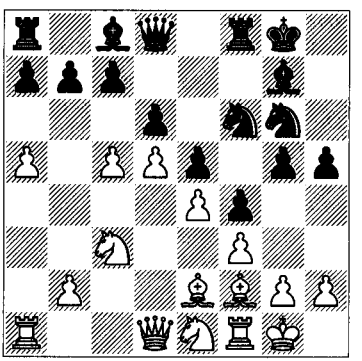
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 0-0 5 ♘f3 d6 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♘e1 ♘d7 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 ♘f6?!

With this hasty move, Black allows White to break on the queenside at once. The knight should stay on d7, restraining c5. White's queenside play and Black's kingside play are closely related and must be considered together. Sometimes frustrating the opponent's plan is more valuable than insisting on your own.

12 c5 f4 13 ♗f2 g5 14 a4

Owing to Black's error, White had a pleasant alternative in 14 ♖c1, switching his attention to the c-file.

14...♘g6 15 a5 h5?! *(D)*



White is a step ahead. It is true that having invested two precious tempi in ...♘f6 and ...h5, Black is ready to play ...g4, but his queenside lies open and vulnerable.

16 cxd6 cxd6 17 ♘b5 g4

If 17...a6, then 18 ♗b6 ♕e7 19 ♘c7 and the knight is ready to jump to e6, cutting off the c8-bishop's diagonal and thus keeping the counter-attack under control.

18 ♗xa7 g3 19 ♗b6 ♕e7 20 ♘c7 ♘d7

A clever but temporary solution to Black's problems.

21 h3

21 ♘xa8 ♕h4 22 h3 ♘xb6 23 ♘xb6 ♗xh3 24 gxh3 ♕xh3 obviously gives Black counterchances.

21...♘xb6

21...♕h4 22 ♘e6 neutralizes Black's aggressive intentions.

22 axb6 ♖xa1 23 ♕xa1 ♘h8

The manoeuvre ...♘h8-f7-g5 is the only way to get rid of the white knight which at e6 will stifle any activity.

24 ♗c4 ♘f7 25 ♘e6 ♘g5 26 ♕a2

In the later game Krivoshei-Bindrich, Leutersdorf 1999, White found a simpler solution: 26 ♘xg5 ♕xg5 27 ♘d3 ♕h4 28 ♖c1, demonstrating that 28...♗xh3 29 gxh3 ♕xh3 30 ♖c2 is harmless. Having secured his king, he could proceed to make use of the pawn surplus on the other wing. There followed 28...♗f6 29 ♖c2 ♗d8 30 ♕a5 ♕e7 31 ♘b4 ♔h8 32 ♘c6, etc.

26...♘xe6 27 dxe6 ♖e8 28 ♘d3 ♗xe6 29 ♗xe6+?

There is no need to hurry. White can swap bishops at a more convenient moment. 29 ♖c1 was strong, but White underrates the difficulties of the coming endgame.

29...♕xe6 30 ♕xe6+ ♖xe6 31 ♘b4 ♖e8 32 ♖c1

Or 32 ♘d5 ♖a8 33 ♖c1 ♖a2 34 ♖b1 ♔f7 followed by 35...♗f6 and ...♗d8.

32...♖a8 33 ♔f1 ♗f6 34 ♘d5 ♗d8 35 ♔e2

Or 35 ♖c7 ♖a1+ 36 ♔e2 ♖g1.

35...♔f7 36 ♔d3 ♖a6 37 ♖c8 ♗xb6 38 ♖b8 ♗g1 39 ♖xb7+ ♔g6 40 ♖d7

Stronger is 40 ♖c7.

40...♔g5 41 h4+ ♔g6

41...♔xh4 obviously loses to 42 ♖g7, when the king is trapped.

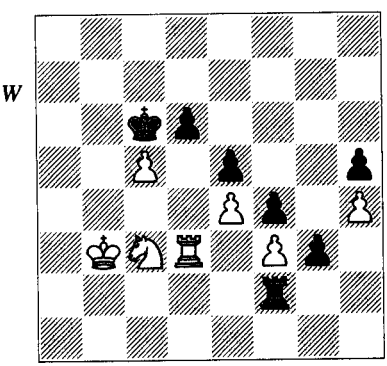
42 ♔c2

Again 42 ♖c7 is natural.

42...♗d4 43 ♔b1 ♗c5 44 ♖b7 ♖a4 45 ♖b3 ♔f7 46 ♖c3 ♔e8 47 ♖d3 ♖a7 48 ♔c2 ♔d7 49 b4 ♖a2+

White has finally carried out b4 in less favourable circumstances than he could have achieved much earlier when the black king was far away. Black's chance is his g-pawn.

50 ♔b3 ♖xg2 51 bxc5 ♖f2 52 ♘c3 ♔c6 *(D)*



The point is that 53 cxd6?? would lose to 53...♔d7, while the alternative leads to the reduction of material, but Black's worries do not stop there.

53 ♖xd6+ ♔xc5 54 ♖d5+ ♔c6 55 ♖xe5 ♖xf3 56 ♖g5

There is no time for 56 ♖xh5 due to 56...♖xc3+, etc.

56...♖f2 57 ♘d5?

Correct was 57 e5 threatening 58 e6 ♔d6 59 ♖e5, when White will be quicker. Then:

a) In case of 57...g2 White can reply 58 ♖g6+ ♔d7 59 e6+ ♔e8 60 ♘e4, when 60...♖f3+ 61 ♔c4 ♖g3 loses to 62 ♘xg3 fxg3 63 ♖g8+, etc., while 60...♖e2 fails also to 61 ♘f6+ and Black will not be able to avoid the loss of the f4-pawn and the g2-pawn.

b) 57...♖f1 58 ♔c4 ♖e1 59 ♖g6+ ♔d7 60 ♔d5 f3 61 ♖g7+ ♔e8 (alternatively, 61...♔c8 62 ♔c6) 62 ♔e6 ♔d8 (62...♖xe5+ fails to 63 ♔xe5 f2 64 ♔e6 and now 64...♔f8 65 ♖f7+, followed by 66 ♘e2, or 64...♔d8 65 ♘b5, etc.) 63 ♔d6 ♔c8 (63...♔e8 loses to 64 e6) 64 ♖xg3 f2 65 ♖g8+ ♔b7 66 ♖f8 f1♕ 67 ♖xf1 ♖xf1 68 e6 and White wins.

57...g2 58 ♘b4+ ♔d6 59 e5+ ♔d7 60 ♖g7+ ♔e8 61 ♘d3 ♖f3 62 ♖xg2 ♖xd3+ 63 ♔c4 ♖g3 64 ♖a2 f3 65 ♔d5 ♖g2 66 ♖a3 f2 67 ♖f3 ♔e7 68 ♖f4 ♖g4 69 ♖xf2 ♖xh4 70 ♖a2 ♖b4 71 ♖a7+ ♔e8 72 ♔c6 h4 73 ♖h7 ♖d4 74 ♔c5 ♖d1 75 ♖xh4 ♔e7 76 ♖h6 ♖d2 77 ♖d6 ♖xd6 78 exd6+ ♔d7 79 ♔d5 ♔d8 80 ♔e6 ♔e8 81 ♔e5 ♔d7 82 ♔d5 ♔d8 83 ♔e5 ♔d7 84 ♔d5 ♔d8 85 ♔c5 ♔d7 86 ♔d5 ♔d8 87 ♔e4 ♔d7 88 ♔d5 ♔d8 89 ♔c4 ½-½

Attacking on one wing and defending on the other is not an easy task and requires great sensitivity. Regarding the endgame phase, we shall not say anything.

Piket – Ivanchuk
Wijk aan Zee 1999
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♘e1 ♘d7 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 ♖c1

This idea is linked with a pawn sacrifice explored by several Croatian players a decade or so ago. The games we have analysed remind us time and again that each tempo saved can dramatically influence the course of the game as White's queenside play and Black's kingside attack vie for supremacy. White's rook move constitutes a major decision, as it renounces the idea of squeezing Black by a quick advance of the a-pawn, as then the queen's rook would stand well on the a-file. Instead he prepares c5, opening the c-file.

Looking back at the previous examples we notice one common feature: the d7-knight regularly moves to f6 and supports ...g4, the crucial pawn advance if Black is to achieve sufficient counterplay. As we shall soon find out, the purpose of 13 ♖c1 is to compel Black to abandon this manoeuvre.

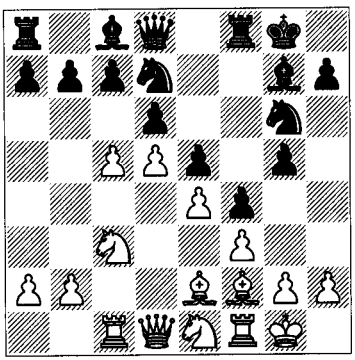
13...♘g6

Black's mind is set on the kingside and this has its logic, but thought must also be given to 13...a5. It would not stop White's pawn advance on the queenside, but on the way it would provoke exchanges. It is an open question whether White could turn his spatial advantage on the wing into something concrete, but at the moment practical examples (like Atalik-Salinnikov, Alushta 1999) are few, which speaks for itself. Black does fear, and not without reason, that when the queenside pawns disappear, White's spatial preponderance on the flank

will be unpleasant; in the end even the d6-pawn may become endangered.

14 c5!? *(D)*

B



As we have seen numerous times, the queen's knight is bound for f6 in order to support the breakthrough ...g4-g3. By sacrificing a pawn, White diverts the knight from its task. As a consequence, Black's counterplay on the kingside will be slowed down, while the lasting pressure on the queenside will provide adequate compensation for the material.

14...♘xc5 15 b4 ♘a6 16 ♘d3

We more often encounter 16 ♘b5, as seen in the next game.

16...♖f7

Korchnoi-Cvitan, European Team Ch, Pula 1997 continued 16...h5 17 ♘b5 ♗d7 18 a4 ♗h6 19 ♖c3 ♖f7 20 ♘xa7 ♖g7 21 ♘b5 ♘f8 (to be followed by ...♘h7-f6) with counterplay, but White's play in this game does not impress.

17 ♘b5 ♗d7 18 a4 ♕e8

By eyeing the a4-pawn before defending his own pawn on a7, Black compels White to play 19 ♘b2, but on b2 the knight is not as badly posted as it may look at first glance. The alternative was 18...♗f8.

19 ♘b2

On this square the knight does not obstruct the plan of doubling major pieces on the c-file, and it also flirts with the manoeuvre ♘c4-a5.

19...♕b8

In case of 19...h5 White should consider both 20 ♘c4 ♗f8 21 ♘a5 ♕b8 22 ♘c3 ♖g7 23 ♖b1 ♘h8 24 ♗b5, and also 20 ♗xa7.

With the text-move, Black defends his material advantage, and is ready to play ...h5 and ...g4. However, White's next move does not give him time.

20 ♕c2

The assessment of the manoeuvre ...♕e8-b8 depends very much on this position.

20...♗e8?!

By further delaying his kingside counterplay, Black condemns himself to passive defence.

The crucial question is whether the line 20...♗xb5 21 axb5 ♘xb4 is viable. My conclusion is that 22 ♕b3 a5 23 b6 offers White, in spite of the serious loss of material, comfortable compensation in the strong activity of his pieces. However, by playing 23...cxb6 Black can extricate himself from his predicament by giving up the material surplus: 24 ♘a4 ♕d8 or 24 ♘c4 ♕f8.

21 ♕d2 h5 22 ♖c4 ♗h6

Despite the unfavourable circumstances, Black is pursuing his dream of a counter-attack. Instead he could resist by 22...♗f6 23 ♖fc1 ♖g7 24 ♕c3

♗d8, but Ivanchuk would not have dwelt upon this passive and unappealing continuation.

23 ♖fc1 ♔g7

This move is further conformation that something has gone wrong with Black's plans (originally the g7-square was intended for the rook), but often Black must dance to White's music and cannot realize his ideal positions. Besides, it is consistent with 22...♗h6.

24 ♘d3 ♕d8

24...c6 is parried by 25 dxc6 bxc6 26 ♖xc6 ♗xc6 27 ♖xc6, while 24...g4 can be met by 25 fxg4 f3 26 g5.

25 ♕c3 g4

Finally both sides have realized their intentions: Black has succeeded in carrying out the pawn advance, while White retakes the sacrificed pawn, reckoning on extracting some benefit from the transaction.

26 ♘xc7

26 ♖xc7!? is a good alternative. After 26...♘xc7 (26...g3 27 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 28 ♗e1 favours White) 27 ♘xc7 ♗d7 28 ♘xa8, Black's best chance to muddy the waters is 28...g3 (rather than 28...♕xa8) 29 ♗xa7 ♕h4 30 h3 (30 ♘c7? ♕xh2+ 31 ♔f1 ♕h1+ 32 ♗g1 ♘h4 33 ♘e1 ♘xg2 34 ♘xg2 ♗h3) 30...♗xh3 31 gxh3 ♕xh3 32 ♗d1 (not 32 ♖c2? ♕h2+ 33 ♔f1 ♕h1+ 34 ♗g1 g2+ 35 ♔f2 ♗g5; 32 ♘e1 is met by 32...♘h4) 32...♕h2+ 33 ♔f1 g2+ 34 ♔e1 ♗g5 35 ♗e2 b6 36 ♗xb6 ♗d8 37 ♔d2, though Black is still struggling.

26...♘xc7 27 ♖xc7 g3 28 ♗e1 gxh2+?

White cannot take on g3, so it was either a time-trouble reaction or one of those moves where we cannot explain why we played them. The obvious move is 28...♗xa4, although after 29 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 30 ♕c7+ ♘e7 31 ♕xb7 Black still has some difficulties to solve. He can try 31...♕b6+ 32 ♕xb6 axb6 33 ♖c7 h4.

29 ♔h1 ♗g5 30 ♖xf7+ ♗xf7 31 ♕c7 ♕b8 32 b5 ♗d8 33 ♕xb8 ♖xb8 34 ♗b4

In this type of pawn-structure it is not uncommon for d6 to be a serious weakness. Here it is fatally weak.

34...♗e7 35 ♖c7 ♔f8 36 ♘b2 ♔e8 37 ♘c4 ♔d8 38 ♗xd6 1-0

White sacrificed a pawn in order to speed up his queenside play and exert long-lasting positional pressure. This paid off as he regained the material with interest.

Atalik – Timoshenko

Romanian Team Ch, Timisu de Sus 1998

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♘e1 ♘d7 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 ♖c1 ♘g6

Bold (but less risky than after 13 b4) appears 13...♖f6 14 b4, and then:

a) 14...a6 balks White's plans on the c-file, but it weakens the b6-square. 15 c5 ♖h6 16 cxd6 cxd6 17 ♘d3 puts the burden of decision on Black: 17...♕e8 will be met by 18 ♗e1 ♕h5 19 h3 when ♘f2 can reinforce the defence, while 17...♘f6 18 ♘a4 ♕e8 19 ♘b6 ♕h5 is parried by the unusual but effective 20 h4, as played in the game

Atalik-Nikolaidis, Chalkida 1997, which on 20...♘g6 can be further strengthened by 21 ♕e1.

b) 14...♖h6 15 ♘d3 ♘f6 16 c5 (in case of 16 ♗e1 Black can switch the pressure to the g-file by 16...♖g6) 16...♕e8 17 ♔h1 ♗d7.

14 c5 ♘xc5

The waiting move 14...a6 weakens the b6-square and 15 ♘a4 h5 16 ♕b3 ♔h8 17 ♘d3 ♖g8 18 cxd6 cxd6 19 ♘b6 ♘xb6 20 ♗xb6 ♕f6 21 ♘f2 made use of it in Yermolinsky-Barcenilla, San Francisco 2000: the bishop vacated f2 for the knight and the breakthrough ...g4 was much delayed.

15 b4 ♘a6 16 ♘b5 ♖f7

After 16...♗d7 17 ♘xa7 ♕b8 18 ♗b5 White will exchange the light-squared bishop, significantly diminishing the danger to his king.

17 ♘xa7 ♗d7

It is of great importance to keep the bishop alive. 17...♘xb4, as played in Atalik-Osterman, Bled 1999, simplifies things on the queenside, but it is not consistent with the inherent problems of the position and the general strategy. After 18 ♘xc8 ♕xc8, the elimination of the light-squared bishop makes it very difficult for Black to break through on the kingside. Then 19 a4 thwarts the planned defensive line based on ...♘a6 and ...b6. White will exert strong pressure on the semi-open files.

18 a4 h5 19 ♘b5

Yermolinsky-Yoshiharu, Chicago 2000 continued instead 19 ♘d3 ♗f8 20 ♘b5 ♖g7 21 ♔h1 ♘h8 22 g3 fxg3 23 ♗xg3 and Black's attack lost its edge. After 23...♘f7 24 ♖g1 ♖c8 25 ♗f2 ♕f6 26 ♗e3 ♖g6 27 ♕d2 ♗e7 28 ♘c3 ♔h7 29 b5 ♘c5 30 ♘xc5 dxc5 White's pawn-majority told in his favour.

19...♗h6 20 ♖c4

...g4 was threatened, but doubling major pieces on the semi-open file is a stronger motivation behind the text-move.

20...♖g7

Black follows the old strategic idea, played by Gligorić half a century ago. Considering what follows, Black should consider 20...♘f8. For instance, 21 ♘d3 ♘h7 22 ♔h1 ♘f6 23 ♕c2 g4 24 ♖c1 ♗g5 25 ♘a3 b6.

21 ♔h1 ♘f8 22 g3! *(D)*

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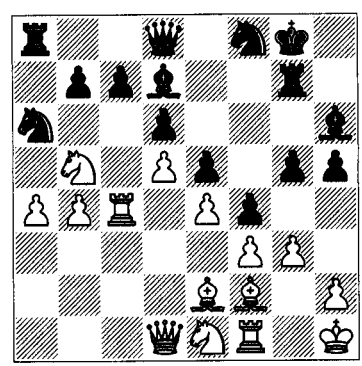

Of the various schemes White has used against Black's kingside pawn offensive, this is the most effective. White is a step ahead of his adversary and so manages to blunt Black's aggressive intentions and stabilize the kingside.

22...fxg3 23 ♗xg3 ♘g6 24 ♘d3 ♘f4

Black expects 25 ♘xf4 gxf4 26 ♗f2, when 26...♗e8 makes it possible for him to defend his only weak point, the backward c7-pawn, but White has a better option...

25 ♗xf4 gxf4

25...exf4 26 e5 is to White's advantage.

26 ♖g1 ♗g5

Exchanging the active rook would harm Black. For instance: 26...♖xg1+ 27 ♕xg1+ ♔h7 28 ♕c1 ♖c8 29 ♗f1 gives White a superior endgame. The light-squared bishops can be exchanged at h3, when the potential passed pawn on the a-file would gain in importance.

27 ♗f1 ♗h4 28 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 29 ♕c2?!

White fails to notice some nuances. When the queen is at c2, taking on c7 will allow ...♗xa4 with gain of tempo. Besides, staying on the first rank would make possible the above-mentioned exchange of the light-squared bishops. Therefore, 29 ♕c1 looks much better. For instance: 29...♖c8 30 ♗g2 followed by 31 ♕f1 and 32 ♗h3.

29...♔h6 30 ♘c3

In case of 30 ♘xc7 ♘xc7 31 ♖xc7 ♗xa4 32 ♕c1 Timoshenko demonstrated 32...♗d1, when Black seizes the initiative.

30...♕e7

Necessary in order to meet 31 b5 by 31...♘c5.

31 ♘e2 b6 32 ♖c6!?

Having secured his king against unwanted intrusions, Atalik relies on his potential passed pawn and his dominance on the light squares.

32...♗xc6 33 ♕xc6 ♖g8

33...♕e8 34 ♕xe8 ♖xe8 35 ♗h3 is advantageous to White.

34 ♕b7 ♘b8 35 ♗h3 ♕d8 36 a5 bxa5 37 bxa5 ♘d7 38 ♕c6 ♘f6 39 ♗e6?

39 a6 ♕b8 40 ♕b7 still keeps the game level.

39...♖g7

White had probably missed this move, which threatens 40...♘xe4, as his next move succumbs quickly.

40 ♕c1

Timoshenko pointed out as somewhat better 40 a6 ♘xe4 41 a7 ♕g5 42 ♗g4, but suggested 42...♘f6 43 a8♕ hxg4 44 ♕h8+ ♘h7 with a clear advantage for Black in spite of the material deficit.

40...♕b8

The queen penetrates decisively.

41 ♘g3 ♗xg3 42 hxg3 ♕b3 43 ♘xf4 ♕xf3+ 44 ♘g2+ ♖g5 0-1

A game spoilt in time-trouble, but offering several instructive points.

Looking back at these seven games in the Mar del Plata variation, we can discern a clear pattern of development. Each time a new idea was tested it was based on the attempt to quicken one's own play and delay that of the opponent: the element of time has been obviously recognized as fundamental. White started with what seemed natural continuations, 13 ♘d3 and then 13 b4, preparing c5 and opening the c-file. When he found them slow and lacking, he tried to accelerate his play with the early 13 ♘b5. In the end he combined both ideas to outrun his opponent and that is the crucial point:

when the centre is closed, a wing attack has to be opposed by a counter-attack on the wing, both of which strive to outrun one another. That has become the essential part of the dynamic process characterizing the blocked centre. The urge of the time is towards the more energetic and quicker, and the selected games of this chapter just reflect the reality of the modern era.

The Fixed Centre

The fixed centre, being a type of the closed centre, shares the basic characteristics of the blocked centre, but shows some differences, too. In comparison with the monumental pawn rampart of the blocked centre, it is a relatively light structure of two enemy pawns established firmly one against the other on two central squares. This central barrier directs activity towards the neighbouring vacant square or the neighbouring open file. If the neighbouring files are closed, then the action moves naturally towards the flanks. Various opening systems provide natural terrain for minority attacks, as well as activity based on pawn majorities. In one important respect, however, the fixed centre differs from the usual pawn blockades we encounter on the central squares. Unless they are destroyed by sacrificial blows, the latter remain intact while the battle is waged around them. On the other hand the fixed centre can often mutate into other types of centre, primarily the dynamic centre. A special case of transformation is what theoreticians have christened **'the mobile pawn-centre'**. It is characterized by a pawn advance on the neighbouring central file, which is mostly found with some variations of the Queen's Gambit and the Nimzo-Indian. We shall observe all of this in the instructive games that follow.

Alekhine – Eliskases
Olympiad, Buenos Aires 1939
Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 cxd5

This simple exchange in the centre causes Black more difficulties than prolonging the tension by 7 ♗g5 and in spite of its apparent simplicity it demands a precise response.

7...♘xd5

7...exd5 8 ♗b5+ is not much different.

8 ♗b5+

In the 1960s the continuation 8 ♗d3 ♘c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 became popular, but the more direct text-move is not naïve either.

8...♗d7

8...♘c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 guarantees White freer play.

9 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7?!

This incautious response has far-reaching consequences. Correct was 9...♕xd7 and in case of 10 ♘e5 then 10...♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♕d5.

10 ♘xd5 exd5 11 ♕b3 *(D)*

And here we are: the exchanges in the centre have brought about a typical position with a fixed centre – two central pawns blocking each other and the

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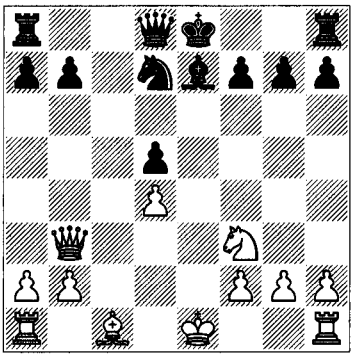

neighbouring files open. White's last move announces his intentions in the coming phase: by exerting pressure on the exposed points b7 and d5, White will try to take command of the open files.

11...♘b6 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♗f4 ♗d6 14 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 15 ♖fe1

White is just a step ahead, but in symmetrical pawn-formations it is usually a meaningful step. White will use it to seize an open file first. Note also that the knight on f3 is superior to its counterpart on b6 and that 15...♘c4 would be met by 16 ♘e5, a move White has prepared with the text-move.

While analysing this game it suddenly dawned upon me that a year earlier, in the great AVRO tournament of 1938, the game Botvinnik-Alekhine led to a position which had some essential similarities. I believe a comparison would be useful to the reader. It went like this: 1 ♘f3 d5 2 d4 ♘f6 3 c4 e6 4 ♘c3 c5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 e3 ♘c6 7 ♗c4 cxd4 8 exd4 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 b6? 11 ♘xd5 exd5 12 ♗b5 ♗d7 13 ♕a4 ♘b8 14 ♗f4 ♗xb5 15 ♕xb5 a6 16 ♕a4 ♗d6 17 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 18 ♖ac1 and, having grabbed the open file, Botvinnik squeezed out a whole point in a memorable endgame. Eliskases stands relatively better than Alekhine did in that game, but we should not underrate Black's difficulties.

15...♖ac8 16 ♖ac1 h6

At the moment 16...f6 looks better, but experience shows that if Black weakens his second rank like this, then the permanent weakening of the kingside has long-lasting consequences.

17 ♘e5 ♖c7 18 g3

The king needs some air, but note that in case of ...f6 the white knight is prepared a fine post at f4.

18...♖fc8 19 ♖xc7 ♖xc7

After 19...♕xc7 White continues 20 ♕a3 a6 21 ♕a5 with advantage.

20 ♕b5 ♘d7

The major-piece endgame turns out more difficult than Black expected. He should have tried 20...♖e7.

21 ♘xd7 ♖xd7

21...♕xd7 does not essentially alter the circumstances after 22 ♖e8+ ♔h7 23 ♕e2.

22 ♖e8+ ♔h7 23 h4!

The h-pawn holds the key to Black's kingside. By advancing to h5 it will open the position and endanger the enemy king.

23...a6?!

This just helps White as it chases his queen where it intends to go. 23...h5? 24 ♖a8 a6 would fail to 25 ♕e2, but 23...g6 should be preferred, with 24 ♕e2 h5 25 ♖a8 ♖e7 in mind.

24 ♕e2 ♖d8 25 ♖e7 ♖d7 26 ♖e5 g6

Unfortunately for Black, it was too late to try to stop White's damaging reply by 26...♕g6 due to 27 h5 ♕b1+ 28 ♔g2 ♕xa2 29 ♕c2+ g6 30 ♕c8, etc.

27 h5

When the black kingside is opened up, the combined threats to the king and the d5-pawn will bring fruit.

27...♕f6 28 ♕e3 ♖d6 29 ♕b3 ♖b6 30 hxg6+ ♕xg6 31 ♕xd5 ♖xb2 32 ♖f5 ♖b5?

The rook endgame that now arises is hopeless for Black. Stronger was 32...♔g8, when Alekhine thought that 33 ♖f4 ♖b5 34 ♕d7 should win. Then 34...♖b1+? 35 ♔h2 ♕h5+? 36 ♖h4 ♕f3 37 ♕c8+ is indeed winning for White. However, Black has a tougher defence in 34...♕b1+ 35 ♔g2 ♕xa2, controlling the crucial d5-square and ready to oppose checks on the g-file. This continuation demonstrates that White cannot cede the fifth rank to his opponent. Therefore 33 ♕f3! is correct, keeping the vital squares under control and preparing the advance of the passed pawn.

33 ♖xf7+ ♔g8 34 ♖f6+ ♖xd5 35 ♖xg6+ ♔h7 36 ♖b6 ♖xd4 37 ♖xb7+ ♔g8 38 ♖b6 ♖a4 39 ♖xh6 ♖xa2 40 ♔g2 a5 41 ♖a6 a4 42 ♖a7 a3 43 g4 ♔f8 44 g5 ♔g8 45 ♔g3 ♖a1 46 ♔g4 ♖g1+ 47 ♔f5 ♖g2 48 f4 a2 49 ♔f6 1-0

Obviously, when one of the central files is blocked, attention turns to the other central file or, sometimes, the neighbouring bishop's (c- or f-) file. To command the open files is the key to success. In our next game the decisive events happen on the d-file.

Bronstein – Reshevsky
Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♘a5 10 ♗c2 c5 11 d4 ♕c7 12 ♘bd2 ♘c6 13 dxc5 dxc5

The manner in which Black organizes his defence is old and most principled. The manoeuvre ...♘a5-c6 makes ...c5 possible, enhancing the pressure on White's pawn-centre and provoking him into a decision. In later decades players increasingly preferred to block the centre by replying d5, but at the time when this game was played, the prevailing opinion was that the exchange offered more. White hoped to be able to make use of the light squares d5 and f5 and further weaken the enemy pawn-structure by undermining it with a later a4.

14 ♘f1 ♖d8?!

14...♗d6, preparing 15...♘e7, looks solid though somewhat passive. In the following years 14...♗e6 15 ♘e3 ♖ad8 developed into the main line. Black firmly controls the sensitive central d5-square and he stopped worrying about 16 ♕e2 c4 17 ♘f5 when 17...♖fe8 18 ♗g5 ♘d7 was found to be adequate. Tournament practice demonstrated that it is the other rook which should move to d8.

15 ♕e2 ♘h5

After 15...♗e6 16 ♘e3 c4 (16...g6 17 ♘g5 ♗c8 allows 18 ♘d5) 17 ♘f5 ♘d7 18 ♘g5 the black kingside is exposed to strong pressure. 18...♘c5 led to disaster after 19 ♘xg7 ♔xg7 20

♕h5 in Torre – Loheac-Amoun, Olympiad, Siegen 1970.

16 a4

Seizing the a-file favours White. Besides, sooner or later the black queenside pawns may become vulnerable.

16...♖b8 17 axb5 axb5 18 g3!

By denying Black's knight the desired f4-square, this quiet pawn move changes the course of events on the kingside.

18...g6

Given that 18...♗xh3 does not work because of the obvious 19 ♘g5, Black must acquiesce to a more modest role.

19 ♔h2

In Fischer-Eliskases, Mar del Plata 1960, White continued more energetically 19 h4 ♗e6 20 ♘e3 c4 21 ♘g5, provoking 21...♗xg5 (if 21...♗c8 then 22 ♘d5) 22 hxg5 ♘a5 23 ♘g4 ♗xg4 24 ♕xg4, gaining a clear advantage.

19...♗e6 20 ♘e3 c4 21 ♖d1

By exchanging a pair of rooks, White will preserve his domination of the a-file and improve his chances on the open central file as well.

21...♖xd1 22 ♕xd1 ♖d8 23 ♕e2 ♕c8 24 ♘d5! *(D)*

The pawn sacrifice offered by Bronstein is not only instructive in itself, but it is also very typical of the central pawn-structure. In the fixed centre, one of the central squares often remains weakened and the fight centres around it. Even if the stronger side cannot dominate the weakness, it can often make use of it by tactical means.

24...♗xd5

Let us note in passing that 24...♗xh3 is ruled out by 25 ♘xe5.

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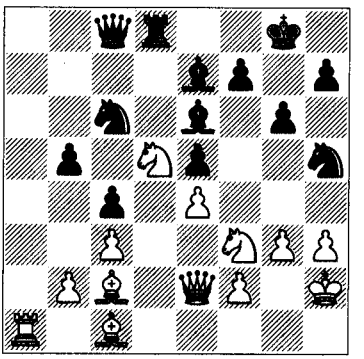

25 exd5 ♖xd5 26 b3

Consistent with the aims of his pawn sacrifice, White pries open the position for his bishops.

26...♘f6 27 ♘g5

White is reluctant to simplify by taking on c4 and mindful of the threatened 27...e4. He maintains the tension, which is unpleasant for Black but double-edged with time-trouble nearing.

27...♘d8 28 bxc4 ♕xc4 29 ♕xc4 bxc4 30 ♖a4 ♘d7

Although short of time, Reshevsky finds the best way to limit the activity of White's dangerous bishop-pair. At c5 the knight will stand excellently, restricting White's pieces, blocking the passed pawn and with ...♘d3 possible at any moment.

31 ♖xc4 ♘c5 32 ♘e4 ♘de6 33 ♘xc5 ♘xc5 34 ♖b4 ♘d3 35 ♖b8+ ♔g7 36 ♗e3 e4

36...♗c5 would fail to 37 ♖b5 e4 38 ♗xd3 exd3 39 ♗xc5, whereupon the black king has no refuge against the check.

37 ♖e8 ♗f6 38 ♖c8?!

Natural was 38 c4 although 38...♖e5 holds on. White overlooks the following tactical stroke...

38...♘xf2! 39 c4

Now 39 ♗xf2 leads to a draw, but White, who has kept his initial advantage all through the game, is reluctant to accept the truth. Or perhaps it is the scent of victory and the nasty trap he sets that keep him going.

39...♖a5 40 ♗b3 ♖a3?

Fortes fortuna iuvat. 40...♘d3 is another story. Black forgets that his king is in a mating-net.

41 ♗c5 ♗e7 42 ♗xa3 ♗xa3 43 c5 e3 44 c6 ♘e4 45 ♖e8 f5 46 ♗c4 ♗d6 47 c7 ♗xg3+ 48 ♔g2 ♗xc7 49 ♖e7+ ♔f6 50 ♖xc7 f4 51 ♔f3 1-0

Although the game was marred by time-trouble, it remains an impressive lesson on a type of fixed centre.

Botvinnik – Petrosian

World Ch match (game 14), Moscow 1963
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗e7 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗f4

Several times in his career Botvinnik showed a preference for developing his king's knight at e2, planning a later pawn advance in the centre by f3 and e4. By trying to provoke ♘f3 with his third move, Petrosian avoids this continuation, and we enter a different type of closed centre.

5...c6 6 e3 ♗f5 7 g4 ♗e6 8 h3

With his king safe in the centre, White can afford to make a pawn advance on the wing.

8...♘f6 9 ♗d3

To 9 ♘f3 0-0 (but obviously not 9...c5 due to 10 ♗b5+) 10 ♕c2 Black would also react by 10...c5. White has seized a spatial advantage on the kingside, but he would also be well-placed to take quick action if Black tried to castle queenside. In such a situation active counterplay is an imperative.

9...c5 10 ♘f3 ♘c6 11 ♔f1

11 0-0 would permit 11...h5, but castling 'by hand', leaving the rook at h1, is safe. A fine judgement!

11...0-0 12 ♔g2 cxd4

12...♖c8 13 ♖c1 ♖e8 14 dxc5 ♗xc5 15 ♘b5 ♗f8 16 ♘fd4 gave White strong pressure in Korchnoi-Karpov, World Ch match (game 13), Merano 1981.

13 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 14 exd4 *(D)*

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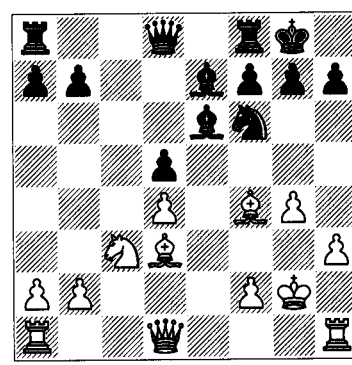


So the initial phase of the game leads us again into a position characterized by the fixed centre. White controls the central squares e4 and e5 and is well prepared for the middlegame struggle.

14...♘d7?!

This will prove to be a sheer loss of time. Either 14...♖e8 or 14...♖c8 was logical.

15 ♕c2 ♘f6

15...h6 is worse in view of 16 ♕d2 ♗g5 17 ♗xg5 hxg5 18 ♖ae1, planning 19 ♗c2, while 15...g6 hardly comes into consideration due to 16 ♗h6 ♖e8 17 f4.

Fortunately for Black, the knight can go back because after the text-move, 16 g5 would be parried by 16...♘h5.

16 f3

Several useful functions are contained in this modest pawn move: the e4-square is placed under control, the f2-square will be available to the queen and a later h4 is made possible.

16...♖c8 17 ♗e5 ♗d6 18 ♖ae1

We already learnt that the fixed central pawns direct action towards the neighbouring open file. White is ready to double rooks on the e-file.

18...♗xe5 19 ♖xe5

19 dxe5 d4 plays into Black's hands.

19...g6 20 ♕f2 ♘d7?!

The centralized pieces make one nervous and often provoke a reaction such as this. The knight is bound on a dubious, time-consuming manoeuvre. 20...♕d6 is correct, when Black is ready to counter 21 f4 with 21...♘e4, opening the position and creating counterchances.

21 ♖e2 ♘b6 22 ♖he1 ♘c4 23 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 24 ♖d2 ♖e8 25 ♖e3 a6 26 b3 ♖c6 27 ♘a4

The pawn-structure favours the active knight against the lame bishop. It is time to improve its position and move it towards the central squares.

27...b6 28 ♘b2 a5 29 ♘d3 f6

The d3-knight has been denied access to e5, but at the price of permanently weakening the kingside.

30 h4!

In order to gain the central e5-square for the knight, the g5 advance must be carried out.

30...♗f7 31 ♖xe8+ ♗xe8 32 ♕e3 ♗f7 33 g5 ♗e6 34 ♘f4 ♗f7

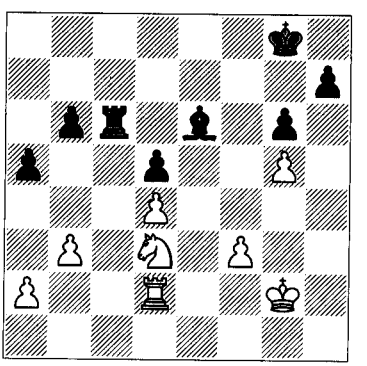
If Black hoped for 34...♗f5, he had to give it up because of 35 gxf6 ♖xf6 36 ♕e5.

35 ♘d3 ♗e6 36 gxf6 ♕xf6 37 ♕g5 ♕xg5+

In my opinion 37...♔g7 was better.

38 hxg5 *(D)*

B



38...a4

We have moved far away from the opening, but note that some basic characteristics of the position have not essentially changed. Black is still facing difficulties on the open e-file, his d5-pawn condemns the bishop to passive defence and e5 is a strong square for White. In such a situation Black naturally looks for a reduction of

material. Note that other ways to do so are not desirable; for example, 38...♔g7 39 ♖e2 h6 40 gxh6+ ♔xh6 41 ♘f4 is most unpleasant for Black. The full measure of Black's difficulties is shown by the fact that if all the pieces were now exchanged at e6, then White would play f4, with a won pawn endgame. As a rule, whenever the lower type of endgame is lost, the weaker side is in serious trouble. I learnt this useful hint for quickly assessing complex endgames from Paul Keres.

39 bxa4

White did not have enough time left on the clock to consider 39 ♘b4 ♖c3 40 bxa4 ♖a3 41 ♖d3 ♖xa4 42 a3 or 39 ♘e5 ♖c3 40 bxa4 ♖a3 41 ♖b2 ♖xa4 42 ♖xb6 ♖xa2+ 43 ♔g3 ♗f5 44 ♖d6, but the text-move maintains an advantage.

39...♖c4 40 a5 bxa5 41 ♘c5 ♗f5 42 ♔g3

The stronger king is an additional positive element in White's favour.

42...a4 43 ♔f4 a3 44 ♔e5 ♖b4 45 ♘d3

45 ♘b3 is met by 45...♗b1, while 45 ♖e2 ♖b2 46 ♖e3 ♖xa2 47 ♔f6 is not enough due to 47...h5.

45...♖b5 46 ♔d6 ♔f7 47 ♔c6 ♗xd3 48 ♖xd3 ♖b2 49 ♖xa3 ♖g2

The alternative was to activate the king by 49...♔e6 50 ♖e3+ ♔f5 51 a4 ♖a2 (51...♖b4 is bad due to 52 ♖e5+ ♔f4 53 a5 ♖xd4 54 ♖xd5). However, apart from 52 ♖e5+ ♔f4 53 ♔b5 ♖b2+ 54 ♔a5 ♔xf3 55 ♖xd5 ♔e4 56 ♖b5 there is also 52 ♔b5 ♖b2+ 53 ♔c5 ♖c2+ (or 53...♖a2 54 ♖e5+ ♔f4 55 ♔b4) 54 ♔xd5 ♖a2 55 ♖e5+ ♔f4 56 ♔e6 ♖xa4 57 d5 ♖a8 58 ♖e4+ ♔xf3 59 ♖h4, etc.

50 ♔xd5 ♖xg5+ 51 ♔c6 h5 52 d5 ♖g2 53 d6 ♖c2+ 54 ♔d7 h4

In case of 54...g5 there is 55 ♖a5 ♔f6 56 ♔d8 h4 57 d7 h3 58 ♖a6+ ♔g7 59 ♖e6 h2 60 ♖e1 ♖g2 61 ♔e8 ♖g1 62 ♖e7+ and White will be quicker.

55 f4 ♖f2

55...g5 is also futile: 56 fxg5 ♔g6 57 ♔d8 ♔xg5 58 d7 ♔g4 59 ♖a8 h3 60 ♔e7 and White promotes the pawn first.

56 ♔c8 ♖xf4 57 ♖a7+ 1-0

Much time has passed since these games were played, but they still provide excellent lessons on the fixed centre. So far we have examined cases in which one of the central files was open, but in most cases we encounter the type of closed centre with no central file open. In such circumstances the play takes place mainly on the wings. We start with an example showing that chess masters have been aware of the positional requirements in such situations for more than a century.

Pillsbury – Marco

Paris 1900

Queen's Gambit

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♘f3 b6 7 ♗d3 ♗b7 8 cxd5 exd5?!

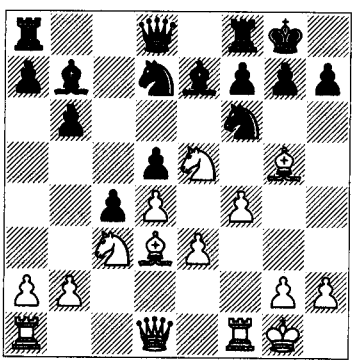
When the light-squared bishop is fianchettoed, it is better to keep the long diagonal open, especially when there is an additional reason for it:

after 8...♘xd5 the exchanges simplify and alleviate Black's difficulties. Of course, that is even better in the later version of this line, named after Tartakower, where ...h6 has been included.

9 ♘e5

By centralizing his king's knight early on in the circumstances of the closed centre White announces his intention to play on the kingside. The knight will be supported by f4 and followed by further attacking steps – an idea credited to Pillsbury. After 9 ♕c2 ♘bd7 10 0-0-0 play would transpose into Rubinstein's games against Teichmann in Vienna 1908 and Znosko-Borovsky in St Petersburg 1909, also characterized by a kingside pawn attack carried out brilliantly and with deep understanding of the possibilities offered by the type of closed centre we have on the board.

9...♘bd7 10 f4 c5 11 0-0 c4? *(D)*



There are two good arguments to be made against blocking the position. In the first place, responding to White's menacing posture on the kingside by advancing the queenside majority looks rather slow. Besides, the possibility of the simplifying ...♘e4 is lost.

12 ♗c2 a6 13 ♕f3

By threatening 14 ♘xc4, White wins a tempo to transfer his queen to an attacking position.

13...b5 14 ♕h3 g6 15 f5

Opening the f-file will significantly increase the pressure.

15...b4 16 fxg6 hxg6 17 ♕h4!

Black was hoping for 17 ♘e2, which would give him a decisive moment of relief. However, this fine attacking move highlights the weakness of f6, leading to a destructive attack.

17...bxc3 18 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 19 ♖xf6 a5 20 ♖af1 ♖a6

Black is doing what he can to protect his kingside, but the concentration of white forces is simply too great.

21 ♗xg6 fxg6 22 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 23 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 24 ♕h8+ ♔f7 25 ♕h7+ 1-0

Five years earlier in Hastings, Tarrasch suffered at Pillsbury's hands in similar circumstances, but the lesson obviously was not absorbed. Against Pillsbury's clear, logical plan stood Marco's superficially organized defence.

Botvinnik – Smyslov

World Ch match (game 2), Moscow 1954

Nimzo-Indian Defence

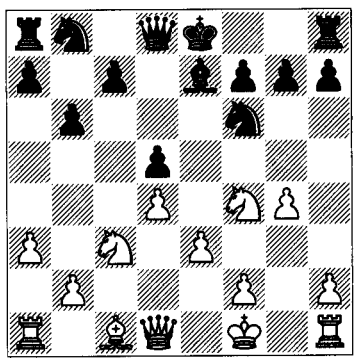
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 b6 5 ♘e2 ♗a6 6 a3 ♗e7 7 ♘f4

At the time of the Moscow match this continuation was in fashion. In

later years 6 ♘g3 was to prevail, although with mixed fortunes.

7...d5 8 cxd5 ♗xf1 9 ♔xf1 exd5 10 g4! *(D)*

B



This unexpected and in those days certainly unusual move caught Black by surprise. However, it is logical and in deep harmony with strategic considerations. The centre is closed, and since White has a pawn-majority on the kingside, his chances lie there.

10...c6

Some commentators found this response irresolute and suggested 10...g5, with 11 ♘d3 h5 12 gxh5 ♖xh5 13 ♕f3 c6 in mind. However, Botvinnik intended the sharper 11 ♘h5 ♘xh5 12 gxh5 c6 13 ♕f3, planning 14 e4 exerting pressure in the centre and on the g5-pawn.

11 g5 ♘fd7 12 h4 ♗d6?

After 12...0-0 13 e4 dxe4 14 ♘xe4 Black is still facing difficulties in development, but the idea of spending time to exchange the bishop for the f4-knight strikes one as highly suspicious. More cautious was 12...♘f8, intending to follow up with 13...♘g6 or 13...♘e6.

13 e4 dxe4 14 ♘xe4 ♗xf4 15 ♗xf4 0-0 16 h5

Taking advantage of Black's indecision and errors, White has seized a strong initiative. 17 h6 is an unpleasant threat and White's minor pieces are actively placed in the centre, while Black still needs time to finish his development. Note also that the white king has found a secure refuge at f1.

16...♖e8

16...♘a6 is too slow because of 17 h6 g6 18 ♕a4, while 16...♕e7 just invites 17 ♕f3 followed by 18 ♖e1.

17 ♘d6 ♖e6 18 d5!

White's kingside play caused disharmony in Black's defence and now the central thrust reaps the reward.

18...♖xd6

18...cxd5 fails to 19 ♕xd5 ♘a6 20 ♘xf7! ♔xf7 21 g6+ hxg6 22 hxg6+ ♔e7 23 ♗d6+! ♔f6 24 ♕f3+ ♔xg6 25 ♖g1+ ♔h7 26 ♕f5+, etc.

19 ♗xd6 ♕xg5 20 ♕f3

Another strong move.

20...♕xd5

20...cxd5 is equally hopeless in view of 21 ♖g1 ♕h4 22 ♖g4 ♕d8 23 ♖e1.

21 ♕xd5 cxd5 22 ♖c1 ♘a6 23 b4

Lacking coordination, the black forces are an easy prey.

23...h6 24 ♖h3 ♔h7 25 ♖d3 ♘f6 26 b5 ♘c5 27 ♗xc5 bxc5 28 ♖xc5 ♖b8 29 a4 ♖b7 30 ♖dc3 1-0

Half a century after Pillsbury, Botvinnik provided a memorable lesson on the subject. In both cases White's play was directed at the kingside. In

tournament practice, however, it is the queenside where the main battle generally takes place.

Portisch – Radulov
Budapest 1969
Dutch Defence

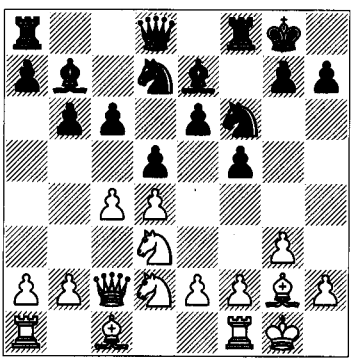
1 c4 f5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 g3 e6 4 ♗g2 ♗e7 5 0-0 0-0 6 d4 c6 7 ♕c2 d5 8 ♘bd2

Reshevsky liked this continuation and played it with great skill. White has in mind the knight manoeuvres ♘f3-e5-d3 and ♘d2-f3-e5, by which he takes control of the important dark squares, balking Black's counterplay while keeping a firm grip on the centre.

8...b6

While analysing this encounter, I recalled an older game. In Reshevsky-R.Byrne, New York 1951, Black played 8...♕e8 and they continued 9 ♘e5 ♕h5 10 ♖b1 (10 ♘df3 ♘e4 11 ♘d3 g5 12 ♘fe5 is obviously good, too) 10...a5 11 b3 ♘bd7 12 ♘d3 g5 13 a3 ♗d6 14 ♘f3 ♘e4 15 ♘fe5 ♖f6 16 ♗f3 ♕h3 17 ♗g2 ♕h5 18 b4 axb4 19 axb4 ♖h6 20 h3 ♘xe5 21 dxe5 ♗f8 22 c5 ♖g6 23 ♔h2 f4 24 ♗f3 fxg3+ 25 fxg3 ♕h6 26 ♗xe4 dxe4 27 ♘f2 and Black was lost. His kingside play, motivated by the stable pawn-centre, was not strong enough to be successful. Apart from the tactical errors, behind the events there looms the strategic drawback of the Dutch – its sleepy queenside pieces. With the text-move Black seeks to avoid such a situation by taking care of queenside development at once. Since Portisch succeeds in highlighting the negative sides of this defensive array, I would suggest 8...♘e4 as the best practical solution.

9 ♘e5 ♗b7 10 ♘d3 ♘bd7 *(D)*



11 b4

The stable situation in the central sector justifies this natural pawn advance, seizing space and taking the initiative. There is a marked difference in comparison with the above Reshevsky game: there are no passive pieces in White's camp. The pawn advance will get strong support. Note that 11 ♘f4 ♔f7 does not bring White much at the moment, but as the next move shows, it continues to be a worry for Black.

11...♖e8?!

Together with the next move this aims to support ...e5, but since he is unable to execute this plan, 11...a5 comes into consideration to oppose the growing pressure on the queenside.

12 a4 ♗d6 13 ♘f3 ♘e4 14 c5 bxc5

Opening the b-file favours White, but other possibilities are unattractive as well.

15 bxc5 ♗c7 16 ♗f4!

Simple and standard, but strong. It is all about the dark squares: after the exchange White will obtain complete domination of e5, while the e4-knight can be chased away at will. Besides, Black's kingside counterplay will be thwarted.

16...♗xf4 17 gxf4 ♕c7

Black opts for a passive defence. One would rather resort to the more active 17...g5.

18 ♘fe5 ♘ef6 19 ♖fb1 a5?

This turns out to open a breach in the defensive wall. 19...♖ab8 was necessary.

20 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 21 ♘e5

The b6-square is now White's property and he can penetrate on the open file.

21...♘xe5 22 fxe5 ♖eb8

Trying to oppose White's control of the open file only ends up enhancing White's superiority. 22...♗c8 was more consistent with Black's play up until now. Of course, apart from his dominance on the b-file, White has the alternative motif of carrying out the e4 advance.

23 ♖b6 ♗a6 24 ♖ab1 ♖b7

Little can be gained by this and objectively 24...♖xb6 at once was better.

25 ♕d2 ♖xb6 26 cxb6

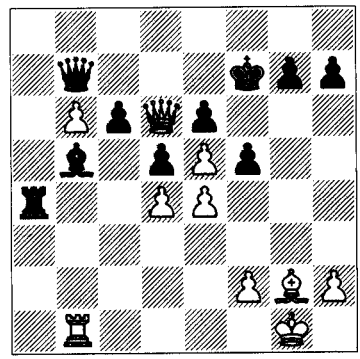
White's queenside advance led to him achieving dominance on the b-file, which has now been transformed into a passed pawn.

26...♕b7 27 ♕xa5 ♗b5

Black rests his hopes on this counterplay, but his king proves to be in greater danger than it looks...

28 ♕b4 ♖xa4 29 ♕d6 ♔f7 30 e4! *(D)*

B



The final shattering blow.

30...♕xb6

30...fxe4 loses after 31 ♗h3 and 30...dxe4 fails to 31 d5 exd5 32 ♗h3 g6 33 ♕f6+ ♔g8 34 ♗xf5 gxf5 35 ♔h1 ♗e2 36 ♖g1+ ♗g4 37 ♕xf5, etc. The text-move fares equally well.

31 exf5 ♕a7 32 ♕xe6+ ♔f8 33 ♗xd5 cxd5 34 ♖xb5 ♖xd4 35 ♕c8+ 1-0

These games show that the leading players of yesteryear knew well how to carry out wing attacks with this type of closed centre. From the first decades of the 20th century onwards we encounter excellent games where White plays with full awareness of the possibilities available to him. However, it proved much more difficult for Black to fight against these slow, seemingly innocuous plans in the typical positions of the Queen's Gambit. In the later decades of the 20th century, we have seen Black start to fight back not

only by avoiding superficial moves in the opening, but also by rejecting the routine, passive resistance. He pays sharp attention to the move-order and the choice of continuations to use, looks for active defence, refusing to be pushed into passive situations of the kind we usually meet. The following games, chosen from among many others, bear witness to it.

Pinter – Marović
Rome 1979
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗e7 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 ♗g5 0-0 6 e3 ♘bd7 7 ♖c1 a6 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♗d3 c6 10 0-0 ♖e8 11 ♕c2 ♘f8 12 h3

By placing the g4-square under control, White prevents the manoeuvre ...♗g4-h5-g6.

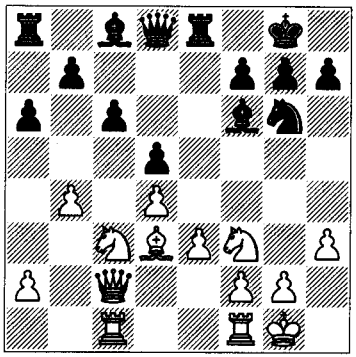
12...♘g6

Black would like to simplify by 12...♘e4, with 13 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 ♘d2 f5 in mind, but White would not be so obliging; 13 ♗f4 does not please Black. 12...♘h5 would force the exchange but the knight's journey to h5 wastes precious time. The text-move prepares the freeing 13...♘e4.

13 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 14 b4 *(D)*

Finally we have the anticipated minority attack in a position that differs slightly from those that we encounter in the standard Exchange QGD. Given that Black's a-pawn has moved to a6, the b6-square is weakened, but on the other hand, ...a6 is useful against the coming minority attack. Besides, ♖c1 is a loss of time in the circumstances.

B



14...♗e7

An important defensive manoeuvre. The d6-square is the proper place for the dark-squared bishop.

15 ♖b1 ♗d6 16 ♘a4 ♕f6

Black abandons the b6-square to the white knight, since he can create active counterplay on the kingside, where White's defences have been weakened by the move h3.

17 ♘b6? ♗xh3! 18 ♘xa8 ♗g4?

Due to a miscalculation I played this move quickly. I was so convinced it was best that while writing this text more than 20 years later the correct move, proposed by Pinter a long time ago, remained in my subconscious and I had to be reminded of it. 18...♗xg2! wins: 19 ♔xg2 ♘h4+ 20 ♘xh4 ♕g5+ and Black mates in the event of 21 ♔h3 ♖xe3+ or 21 ♔f3 ♕h5+, while 19 ♗xg6 ♗xf3 20 ♗xh7+ ♔h8 21 ♕f5 ♕h4 is also terminal.

The little tactical detail on which my idea hung is that Black now threatens mate, but it can be parried.

19 ♘h2 ♗xh2+ 20 ♔xh2 ♕h4+ 21 ♔g1 ♗f3 22 ♗e2 ♗xg2

This leads to perpetual check. After 22...♗e4, 23 ♕d2 ♕g5 is better for Black, but 23 ♗d3 ♗xg2 also leads to a draw.

23 ♔xg2 ♕g5+ 24 ♔h2 ½-½

Timman – Kasparov

World – USSR, London 1984
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e3 0-0 6 cxd5 exd5 7 ♘c3 ♘bd7 8 ♗d3 c6 9 ♕c2 ♖e8 10 0-0 ♘f8 11 ♗xf6

For decades White pinned his hopes on the standard minority attack prepared by 11 ♖ab1, but then 11...a5 12 a3 ♘e4 simplifies Black's task and White started to look for an alternative road. Taking on f6 speeds up the pawn advance on the queenside and there can be no doubt it is consistent with the positional requirements.

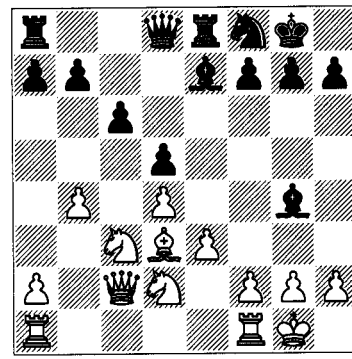
11...♗xf6 12 b4 ♗g4

The earlier game Timman-Spassky, Tilburg 1979 featured a rare continuation that is worth mentioning: 12...a6 13 a4 g6 14 b5 a5. However, after 15 bxc6 bxc6 16 ♘b1 ♕d6 17 ♘bd2 ♘e6, as played, 18 ♘b3 is pleasant for White.

The text-move is played in preparation of 13...♗e7. In case of the immediate 12...♗e7 13 b5 c5 14 dxc5 ♗xc5 15 ♖fd1 White will exert pressure on the isolated pawn.

13 ♘d2 ♗e7 *(D)*

We have seen this defensive manoeuvre before. When the a1-h8 diagonal is closed, the bishop naturally looks for a more active place: d6 will



suit it perfectly. At the same time Black is ready to meet 14 b5 by 14...c5 15 dxc5 ♗xc5. Owing to the well-posted light-squared bishop there can be no meaningful pressure on the isolated pawn. 16 ♘b3 ♗b6 does not change things essentially.

14 ♖ab1 ♗d6

In Korchnoi-Karpov, World Ch match (game 31), Baguio City 1978, Black responded 14...♖c8, when 15 ♗f5 ♗xf5 16 ♕xf5 yielded a slight advantage for White.

15 ♗f5 ♗h5!?

This time Black is not obliged to exchange; this is an unusual but sound retreat.

16 ♖fc1 g6 17 ♗d3 ♕g5

In numerous games characterized by this pawn-structure, the minority attack is a one-sided affair, but Black will have none of it here.

18 ♘e2

18 b5 is still met by 18...c5, when 19 f4 ♕d8 20 ♘xd5 cxd4 21 e4 ♘e6 is good for Black, while after 18 ♘f1 ♗g4 the h-pawn will be set in motion.

18...♘d7

Black constantly keeps an eye on 19 b5, ready to meet it by 19...c5.

19 h3 a6 20 a4 ♖ac8

The advance is restrained.

21 ♘f1 ♗xe2 22 ♗xe2 ♕e7 23 ♕b3 ♘f6 ½-½

If Black responds in an active and precise fashion, then the minority attack can be kept in check. The reader will find further information on the subject in the Chapter 4, 'Pawn-Majorities and Minority Attacks'. Here our focus is on how this type of closed centre directs the play towards the wings. The central pawn-structure, although fixed and firm, influences the course of events by its very firmness. However, on rare occasions, generally when Black threatens to become active on the wing, it turns into a mobile, dynamic structure. This sudden metamorphosis deserves our full attention.

M. Yudovich – Botvinnik
Leningrad 1934
Dutch Defence

1 c4 f5 2 d4 ♘f6 3 g3 e6 4 ♗g2 ♗e7 5 ♘f3 d5 6 0-0 0-0 7 ♘c3 c6

Botvinnik frequently resorted to this variation of the Dutch. In the initial phase of the game Black builds a pawn rampart, the Stonewall, as it is called. There is a lasting weakness in the wall, the e5-square, but for the moment it is of no consequence.

8 ♕c2

On c2 the queen is well-positioned. If Black now attempts to finish his development by 8...♘bd7, then 9 cxd5 provokes 9...cxd5 and then 10 ♗f4 promises Black difficulties on the c-file. If Black gives ground in the centre by the inconsistent 8...dxc4, then 9 e4 opens the play to White's advantage.

8...♕e8

Having built an impenetrable fortress in the centre, Black transfers his queen to h5. His aim is to attack on the kingside, his natural theatre of action. We must note at once that this plan does little for Black's crucial problem – his queenside development. Therefore 8...♘e4 seems to be objectively best, intending to meet 9 ♘e5 with 9...♘d7.

9 ♗f4 ♕h5 10 b3 ♘bd7 11 ♖ad1 ♔h8

The idea behind this move is obvious: Black plans to attack White's king, and so the g8-square is vacated for the rook.

12 ♔h1?!

This loss of tempo cannot be reasonably explained.

12...♖g8 13 e3 g5

What was long in the offing finally takes shape.

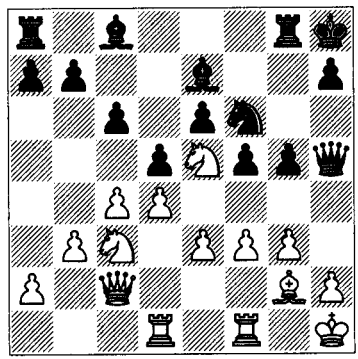
14 ♗c7

This move wins an important tempo, which White uses to centralize the knight on e5. At the same time the f2-pawn is set free.

14...♘e8 15 ♗e5+ ♘xe5 16 ♘xe5 ♘f6 17 f3 *(D)*

Having been attacked on the kingside, White reacts in the centre. He is ready to play e4, which would follow in case of 17...g4 too. The closed, firm centre is transformed into a mobile one. Opening the position at a moment

B



when Black's queenside pieces are still undeveloped would favour White.

17...♗d6! 18 e4 ♘d7

Errors have their consequences. A specific drawback of 12 ♔h1 has been revealed: 19 ♘xd7 would now be punished by 19...♗xg3. This tactical device helps Black to solve his main problem.

19 g4

This move, although it somewhat weakens the kingside, is necessary and logical. 19 exf5 is a bad alternative in view of 19...♘xe5 20 dxe5 ♗xe5 21 f4 gxf4 22 gxf4 ♗d6.

19...♕e8 20 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 21 e5 ♗b4 22 gxf5 exf5 23 cxd5 ♗xc3 24 dxc6

This was criticized in favour of the sounder 24 ♕xc3, but I find it good.

24...♗xc6 25 ♕xc3 ♕e6 26 ♕d2?

Black has managed to block the central pawns and if White does not do anything about it, then Black's majority on the kingside must tell. Despite the apparent risk, White should have continued 26 f4 ♗xg2+ 27 ♔xg2, not fearing 27...gxf4+ 28 ♔h1. 27...♖ac8 is more dangerous. After 28 ♕f3?! ♖c2+, 29 ♖f2? gxf4+ 30 ♔f1 (or 30 ♔h1 ♖xf2) 30...♕a6+ 31 ♕d3 ♖xf2+ 32 ♔xf2 ♕h6 wins for Black. If 29 ♔h1 then 29...g4 forces 30 ♕g3 because 30 d5? fails to 30...♖xh2+ and 30 ♕xb7? to 30...♕h6. However, 28 ♕d3! is correct. It is strange that Botvinnik passed over this critical point in silence.

26...♗d5 27 ♖c1 ♖g7 28 ♖c2 f4

Having stabilized the centre, Black proceeds to make use of his pawn-majority on the kingside and prepare the breakthrough.

29 ♕c1 ♖ag8 30 h3 h5 31 ♔g1 g4 32 hxg4 hxg4 33 ♔f2 ♖h7 34 ♖h1 g3+ 35 ♔e1

The king must step back because if 35 ♔e2 then 35...♕a6+ 36 ♔d2 ♕a5+ 37 ♔e2 ♕b5+, etc.

35...♖xh1+ 36 ♗xh1 ♕h6 37 ♗g2 ♗c6?

Black returns the favour. The last move before the adjournment is mistaken. 37...♗e6, threatening 38...♗f5, should win by capturing the c-file or penetrating on the kingside.

After the text-move, the threat of 38...♕h2 39 ♔f1 ♗b5+ is easily parried.

38 a4 ♗d7

Rather risky. 38...♗d5 comes into consideration since it keeps in check the central pawns.

39 d5 ♗f5 40 ♖c7 ♕h2 41 ♕b2

Black is harassed by mating ideas.

41...♕g1+ 42 ♗f1 ♕e3+ 43 ♗e2 ♗e6 44 ♕c2 ♖g7 45 dxe6?

White blows the chance he has been given. Correct was 45 ♖c8+ ♗g8 (45...♗xc8 46 ♕xc8+ obviously leads

to a draw) 46 ♕f5 g2 47 ♖xg8+ securing the perpetual check.

45...♕f2+ 46 ♔d2 ♕d4+ 47 ♔e1 ♖xc7 0-1

After 48 ♕xc7 g2 there are just a few checks. Yudovich conceived his counter-action in the centre well and despite a serious loss of time (12 ♔h1) he managed to achieve equal chances. Only later errors led to disaster.

Alekhine – Maroczy

Karlsbad 1923

Queen's Gambit

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 ♗e7 5 ♗g5 0-0 6 e3 ♘e4

Nowadays this characteristic move of the Lasker Defence is played after the moves 6...h6 7 ♗h4 have been included; a tempo should not be underrated. In both cases, however, Black seeks simplification.

7 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 8 ♕b3

8 cxd5, forcing exchanges, has been more common, as well as 8 ♕c2, with similar aims. The text-move could be met by 8...c6.

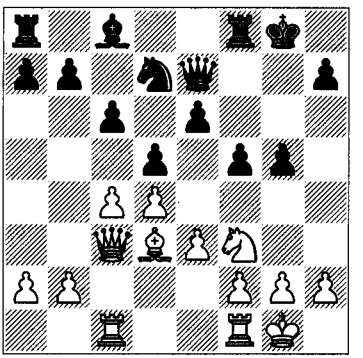
8...♘xc3 9 ♕xc3 c6 10 ♗d3 ♘d7 11 0-0 f5

Later experience showed that Black should cede the centre by 11...dxc4 12 ♗xc4 b6 13 e4 ♗b7 in order to finish his development. With the text-move, Maroczy abandons the basic intention of the Lasker Defence: it is simplification through exchanges and definitely not kingside action.

12 ♖ac1

Waiting for 12...♘f6, as this could be met by 13 ♘e5.

12...g5? *(D)*



Having said 'hop', Black now jumps, but at the wrong moment and in the wrong place. With his queenside still waiting to be developed, he becomes aggressive, when only sheer optimism supports his decision.

13 ♘d2!

Having obtained an obvious lead in development, White prepares to open the position by f3 and e4. The central break is an appropriate answer to Black's attempt at kingside play.

13...♖f7?!

A loss of time in an already critical situation. 13...♘f6 is more natural.

14 f3 e5

Black reacts, not waiting for e4 and hoping that exchanges will enable him to finish his development.

15 cxd5 cxd5 16 e4

The firm, apparently static pawn-centre has become mobile. The plan is fulfilled: the position opens up, favouring the more active white pieces.

16...fxe4 17 fxe4 ♖xf1+ 18 ♖xf1 exd4 19 ♕c7!

Not, of course, 19 ♕xd4 allowing Black to free himself by 19...♕c5. The text-move completely ties up Black's pieces.

19...♔g7 20 ♖f5 dxe4 21 ♘xe4 ♕b4

21...h6 22 h3 would not change the situation.

22 ♖xg5+ 1-0

We should not miss the lesson: as long as the centre is not stable, a wing attack is a risky undertaking. Even the ostensibly firm, immobile centre can sometimes be transformed into a mobile, dynamic formation. As a rule such a metamorphosis represents a grave danger to superficially founded wing attacks.

The Mobile Centre

The last game provided an effective introduction to this subject. We find the mobile centre mostly in some variations of the Queen's Gambit and the Nimzo-Indian. It is formed by the advance of a pawn majority in the centre. Some further examples will explain it best.

Kasparov – Andersson
World Cup, Belfort 1988
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗g5 c6 6 ♕c2 ♗e7 7 e3 ♘bd7 8 ♗d3 0-0 9 ♘ge2

Botvinnik liked this move and employed it on several occasions. White avoids simplifications based on ...♘e4 and plans to advance his central pawns.

9...♖e8

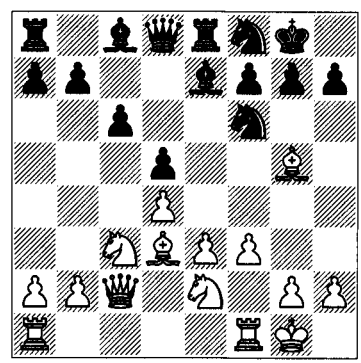
In Botvinnik-Larsen, Noordwijk 1965, Black played 9...h6 10 ♗h4 ♖e8 11 f3 c5 12 0-0 a6 13 ♖ad1 b5 14 ♗f2 c4, resting his hopes on the queenside pawn-majority, but then White seized the initiative with 15 ♗f5 ♘b6 16 ♘g3 ♗f8 17 a3 ♗b7 18 e4.

10 0-0 ♘f8

A somewhat unusual continuation, though in harmony with the logic of the position, was successfully played in Sturua-Ružele, Berlin 1998: 10...g6 11 f3 ♘h5 12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 13 e4 ♘b6 14 ♖f2 ♘g7 15 ♖d1 ♗e6.

11 f3 *(D)*

B



White prepares e4, setting in motion his pawn superiority on the central squares. The mobile centre is taking shape.

11...♗e6

The alternative is again 11...♘h5, seeking simplification. After 12 ♗xe7, 12...♖xe7 13 ♕d2 ♗e6 (if 13...♘e6 14 ♖ad1 g6 then 15 ♗c2 ♘eg7 16 e4, as in Bagirov-Rabiega, 2nd Bundesliga 1995/6) 14 b4 allows White somewhat

the better prospects, as in Lautier-Klovans, 2nd Bundesliga 1997/8. However, 12...♕xe7 looks more natural, intending to meet 13 e4 by 13...dxe4 14 fxe4 ♗e6 and if 15 e5 then 15...c5. After the cautious 15 ♖f2 ♘f6 16 h3 ♖ad8 17 ♖af1 ♘g6 White commands a spatial advantage but Black's position is sound, according to Bareev.

12 ♖ae1

Apart from the perennial question of which rook to move, there is the accompanying question – where to put it. Here the choice is between d1 and e1. The wise solution might be to postpone the decision and play the waiting 12 ♔h1. In the game Sadler-Asrian, FIDE Knockout, Las Vegas 1999, play continued 12...♖c8 13 ♖ad1 ♘g6 14 e4 dxe4 15 fxe4 ♘g4 16 ♗c1 c5 17 e5 (17 ♗b5 ♕c7 gave Black the initiative in Gulko-Sturua, Olympiad, Elista 1998), but 17...cxd4 18 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 19 ♗xg6 ♕xe5 20 ♗f4 ♕c5 21 ♗xh7+ ♔h8 22 ♗e4 ♖cd8 then led to approximately level play.

12...♖c8 13 ♔h1 ♘6d7 14 ♗xe7 ♖xe7?!

Taking with the queen looks to me more natural (compare the next game).

15 ♘f4 ♖c7?!

Another odd response. One would expect 15...♘f6.

16 ♕f2 ♘f6 17 e4 dxe4 18 fxe4 ♖cd7

Black finally manages to increase the pressure on the pawn-centre, but his clumsy array of pieces invites a tactical breakthrough.

19 d5 cxd5 20 ♗b5 ♖c7 21 exd5 ♗d7

Taking on d5 does not work due to the pin on the d-file. 21...♗f5 might appear good, but Kasparov demonstrated a refutation: 22 d6 ♖xe1 (or 22...♕xd6 23 ♖d1 ♕c5 24 ♘fd5) 23 dxc7 ♖xf1+ 24 ♕xf1 ♕d6 (24...♕xc7 25 ♘fd5 ♘xd5 26 ♘xd5 ♕e5 27 ♕xf5) 25 ♗c4.

22 ♗e2

The immediate 22 d6 is parried by 22...♖xe1 23 ♖xe1 ♖xc3.

White's modest retreat still threatens d6, which will cost Black his undefended a7-pawn. Initiative has been transformed into material.

22...♖c8 23 ♕xa7

23 ♘h5 is weaker due to 23...♖e5 24 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 25 ♕xf6 gxf6.

23...b6 24 ♕a6 ♘e4

Black has no compensation for the pawn, but this bad move worsens his situation. The forgotten passed pawn enters the scene again.

25 d6

The vacant d5-square will offer new possibilities.

25...♘xd6 26 ♘fd5 ♖e5 27 ♕xb6 ♘f5 28 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 29 ♗d3 ♖xe1 30 ♖xe1 ♘g6 31 a4

The passed pawns are unstoppable.

31...♔f8 32 a5 ♘d4 33 ♗xg6 hxg6 34 ♖d1 ♘e6 35 ♘b6 ♗c6 36 ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 37 b4 ♘e6 38 b5 1-0

Botvinnik's favourite continuation in the Exchange Variation was again thrown into the limelight after Kasparov's victory and some additional thrashings taken by Black. But defeats and hard work soon produced results. The 1990s found some missing answers.

Lutz – Yusupov
Tilburg 1993
Queen's Gambit

1 c4 e6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 d4 ♘f6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗g5 ♗e7 6 e3 0-0 7 ♗d3 ♘bd7 8 ♘ge2 ♖e8 9 0-0 c6 10 ♕c2 ♘f8 11 f3 ♗e6

Yusupov had a good personal reason to look into the matter. 11...♘h5 12 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 13 e4 dxe4 14 fxe4 ♗g4?! 15 e5! ♖ad8 16 ♘e4 ♘g6 17 ♖ad1 ♖f8 18 h3 ♗xe2 19 ♗xe2 ♘hf4 20 ♗c4 proved advantageous for White in Ivanchuk-Yusupov, Candidates match (game 3), Brussels 1991.

12 ♖ae1 ♖c8 13 ♔h1 ♘6d7 14 ♗xe7 ♕xe7

In the above game Andersson probably did not like to 'expose' the queen on the file of the e1-rook, but the fact does not seem to have any consequences.

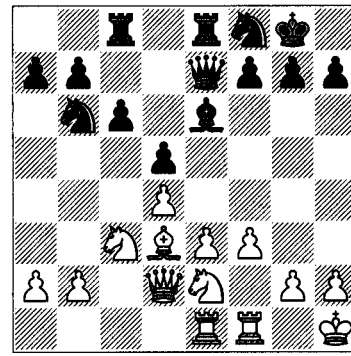
15 ♕d2

Note that 15 e4 would not frighten Black, who has at his disposal the calm 15...dxe4 16 fxe4 c5 17 d5 ♗g4. The mobile centre advances, but if it gets blocked and stuck, its dynamic potential will be on the wane.

15...♘b6 *(D)*

Having reinforced the point d5, Black is again ready to meet 16 e4 by 16...dxe4 17 fxe4 ♗c4. (Instead, 16...c5 would run into difficulties after 17 exd5 ♘xd5 18 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 19 ♘c3 ♕d7 20 ♖xe8 ♖xe8 21 ♕g5 {not 21 dxc5 due to 21...♗c4} 21...♖d8 22 dxc5 ♘e6 23 ♕e3.)

Black has succeeded in keeping the mobile centre in check.



16 b3 ♖cd8 17 a4

In case of 17 e4 dxe4 18 fxe4 ♗g4 the central pawns are vulnerable.

17...♕b4 18 ♘e4 ♕xd2

On other moves 19 ♘c5 follows, but the exchange of queens suits Black. With the queens off the board, the mobile centre is less dangerous.

19 ♘xd2 ♗d7 20 ♘g3

It was time to give up the idea of carrying out e4. 20 ♘f4 is a logical choice.

20...a5 21 ♖e2 ♘e6 22 ♖c1 ♘c8 23 f4?

White has lost touch with his position. 21 ♖e2 was pointless, and 23 f4 is bad. Black, in comparison, methodically improves the position of his pieces.

23...♘d6 24 ♘f3 f6 25 ♔g1 ♖e7 26 h4?

To the weakness of e4, White adds another one, this time on g4.

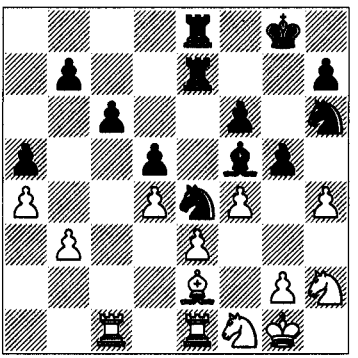
26...♖de8

In response to 26 h4 Black reacts with a long, impressive knight manoeuvre: ...♘d8-f7-h6. The d8-square is vacated.

27 ♔f2 ♘d8 28 ♖ee1 ♘8f7 29 ♘h2 ♘h6 30 ♘gf1?! ♗f5 31 ♗e2

By retreating, White worsens his already difficult situation.

31...♘e4+ 32 ♔g1 g5! *(D)*



Having achieved an obvious positional advantage, Black opens the position for his active pieces.

33 g4

White would avoid the worst by taking on g5, but his damaged position cannot be repaired any more.

33...gxf4 34 gxf5

34 exf4 ♗xg4 35 ♗xg4 ♖g7 would change nothing.

34...♖g7+ 35 ♗g4 ♘xg4 36 ♘xg4 ♖xg4+ 37 ♔h2 f3 38 ♖c2 ♖xh4+ 39 ♔g1 ♔f7 0-1

The crucial question about the mobile centre remains whether the advance of the central pawns can be thwarted or, when the breakthrough is carried out, whether they can be blockaded. Let us compare the following two games and learn from the comparison.

Reshevsky – Petrosian

Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953

Queen's Gambit

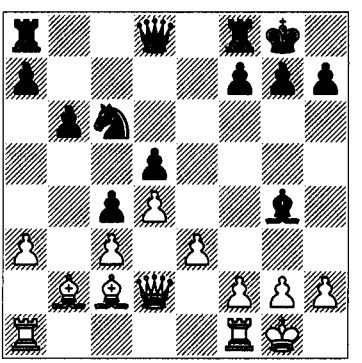
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♗d3 d5 6 ♘f3 c5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 a3 ♗xc3 9 bxc3 b6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 ♗b2

Given that he possesses the bishop-pair, White would like to open the diagonal and so plans 12 dxc5 followed by 13 c4. Black responds by blocking the position, which has its negative sides, but at the moment it is forced. Of other matters Black will have to worry later.

11...c4 12 ♗c2 ♗g4 13 ♕e1 ♘e4

13...♗xf3 14 gxf3 ♕d7 was tried in a number of games, but after 15 ♔g2 and 16 ♖g1 White will use the g-file to his favour, keeping in reserve the breakthrough in the centre.

14 ♘d2 ♘xd2 15 ♕xd2 *(D)*



The dark-squared bishop has been hemmed in, but it is a temporary status which will be changed. In compensation White has obtained a mobile

pawn-centre, which is now ready to advance. Note that as a consequence of the blockade by 11...c4 there is no way to prevent the coming breakthrough.

15...♗h5 16 f3 ♗g6 17 e4 ♕d7 18 ♖ae1 dxe4

Not quite satisfied with the course of events, in a later game in the same tournament versus Smyslov, Petrosian chose 18...f5, but 19 exd5 ♕xd5 20 a4 ♖fe8 21 ♕g5 ♕f7 22 ♗a3 h6 23 ♕g3 ♖xe1 24 ♖xe1 ♖e8 25 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 26 ♔f2 left Black in a difficult endgame.

19 fxe4 ♖fe8 20 ♕f4

White improves the position of his queen and prepares 21 a4. Unfortunately, the immediate 20 a4 does not work due to 20...♘e5 followed by 21...♘d3, when the formidable pawn-centre becomes less convincing.

20...b5 21 ♗d1

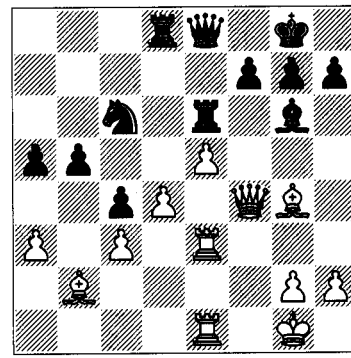
Black is trying to keep the position closed and unpleasant for the white bishops, while White is doing the opposite – looking for more active places.

21...♖e7 22 ♗g4 ♕e8 23 e5 a5 24 ♖e3 ♖d8 25 ♖fe1?!

By doubling rooks and increasing his power on e6, White plans the second breakthrough, but in view of what follows 25 h4 looks much better. While Black is fully occupied with the central pawns, opening a front on the kingside would be difficult to meet.

25...♖e6! *(D)*

Practically forced, but deeply logical and beautiful indeed. Black not only blockades the e-pawn, but also vacates the e7-square to make possible ...♘e7-d5. If he succeeds in doing so,



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the passed pawns will be stuck and the price of an exchange for the accomplishment relatively modest.

26 a4?!

26 h4 still looks the move to play. White expected 26...b4 when 27 d5 ♖xd5 28 ♗xe6 fxe6 29 ♕xc4 opens the position to his advantage, but Petrosian continues to defend by adamantine logic...

26...♘e7! 27 ♗xe6 fxe6 28 ♕f1 ♘d5 29 ♖f3 ♗d3 30 ♖xd3 cxd3 31 ♕xd3 b4 32 cxb4

32 c4 ♘b6 favours Black. Therefore White simplifies the position, acquiescing to the fact that his opponent also possesses a passed pawn after his mighty pawn-centre got hopelessly stuck. The fire goes out slowly.

32...axb4 33 a5 ♖a8 34 ♖a1 ♕c6 35 ♗c1 ♕c7 36 a6 ♕b6 37 ♗d2 b3 38 ♕c4 h6 39 h3 b2 40 ♖b1 ♔h8 41 ♗e1 ½-½

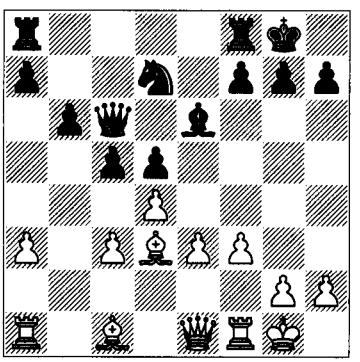
After half a century this game still sticks in my mind as an extraordinary lesson on the mobile centre, the threat it implies and the defensive method to use against it.

Taimanov – Petrosian
Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♗d3 0-0 6 ♘f3 d5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 a3 ♗xc3 9 bxc3 b6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 ♘e5

For the third time in the event Petrosian stubbornly defended his line, but Taimanov was ready for it. The text-move quickly activates the mobile centre.

11...♕c7 12 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 13 f3 ♗e6 14 ♕e1 ♘d7 *(D)*



15 e4

This is what White was looking for and his reaction is understandable, but experience has taught us that more patience is needed with this sensitive position. 15 ♖a2 is a part of the general strategy as it fits in with the central pawn advance or, if it is thwarted by ...f5, with kingside play with h3 and g4.

15...c4?

Black should play 15...f5, when 16 e5 b5 would enable Black to activate the knight via b6. 16 c4 would be met by 16...fxe4 17 fxe4 dxc4 18 d5 ♕d6 19 ♖xf8+ (19 ♗xc4 ♘e5 leads to the desired blockade) 19...♖xf8 20 dxe6 ♘e5.

16 ♗c2 f5 17 e5 ♖f7 18 a4

Black has achieved the blockade, but with an inferior pawn-structure. White can prepare kingside play at his leisure, and Black is left without counterplay.

18...a5 19 f4 b5?!

This will create a passed pawn, but a pawn with no hope. At the same time, opening the position plays into the hands of the bishop-pair.

20 axb5 ♕xb5 21 ♗a3 ♘b6 22 ♕h4 ♕e8 23 ♖f3 ♘c8?!

Another pointless move in an already difficult position leads to disaster. 23...♗d7 was indispensable.

24 ♗a4 ♖d7

Perhaps Black only realized at this point that 24...♗d7 would lose to 25 e6.

25 ♖b1 ♕d8 26 ♗xd7 ♕xd7

Given that 26...♕xh4 loses to 27 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 28 ♗xd5, etc., White is able not only to win the exchange, but also to take the open file. Black's agony begins.

27 ♖g3

27 ♖h3 h6 (or 27...g6 28 ♖b7 ♕xb7 29 ♕d8+ followed by mate) 28 ♖g3 is even quicker.

27...♘a7 28 ♗e7 ♗f7 29 ♕g5 ♗g6 30 h4 ♘c6 31 ♗a3 ♘d8 32 h5 ♘e6 33 ♕h4 ♗f7 34 h6 g6 35 ♕f6 ♕d8 36 ♗e7 ♕c7 37 ♖xg6+ hxg6 38 h7+ ♔xh7 39 ♕xf7+ ♘g7 40 ♔f2 1-0

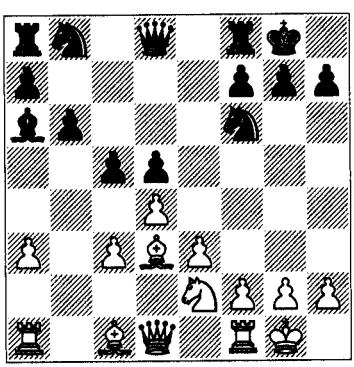
This game is worthy of attentive analysis due to some fine points, but much more in view of the instructive

errors made. All the nuances of the mobile centre are contained in it: the threat of the imminent advance which cannot be stopped, the impatient breakthrough which was not prepared well, two possible blockades, both highly instructive in their positive and negative aspects. The objective verdict on the variation played is best given by master practice: it has disappeared from serious tournaments. I could add that the same assessment afflicted another Nimzo-Indian variation characterized by the mobile centre. I had to think hard to recall a single instructive game played in relatively recent times.

Gulko – Ljubojević
Olympiad, Moscow 1994
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♗d3 d5 6 a3 ♗xc3+ 7 bxc3 c5 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♘e2 b6 10 0-0 ♗a6 *(D)*

W



11 f3

Famous games sometimes leave a lasting stamp on theoretical variations. Botvinnik's win over Capablanca in the AVRO tournament of 1938, which continued 11 ♗xa6 ♘xa6, left an indelible mark on it and it took a long time until Black dared to look for improvements. After 12 ♗b2 ♕d7 13 a4 ♖fe8 14 ♕d3 c4 15 ♕c2 Capablanca's long manoeuvre ...♘b8-c6-a5-b3 could not match the imminent breakthrough in the centre. The question was how to control the central pawn-thrust. Rubinetti-Sanguinetti, Buenos Aires 1977 offered an answer: 12 f3 ♘b8 13 ♘g3 ♘c6 14 ♖a2 ♕d7 15 ♖e2 cxd4 16 cxd4 ♖ac8 17 ♗b2 ♖fd8 kept enough pressure on the mobile pawn-centre. Later 12 ♕d3 was also given a good answer by 12...♘c7 13 f3 ♕e8. It worked as long as White did not ask himself why he should take on a6 at all. He decided to continue his preparations disregarding the a6-bishop.

11...♖e8 12 ♖a2

In the coming events White does not wish to leave his queen's rook out of play.

12...♕c8

In case of 12...♗xd3, it is obvious that White's queen's rook will be needed on the kingside after 13 ♕xd3 ♘c6 14 ♘g3 (one is also attracted by 14 g4, which as far as I know has not been played) planning 15 ♖e2, 16 ♗b2 and 17 e4. Yakovich-Budnikov, Russian Ch, Voronezh 1988 continued 14...♕c7 15 ♖e2 ♘a5 16 e4 cxd4 17 cxd4 ♕c4 18 ♕d1 with a clear advantage for White.

13 ♗b1!

Black decided he could continue to wait with the exchange, but White

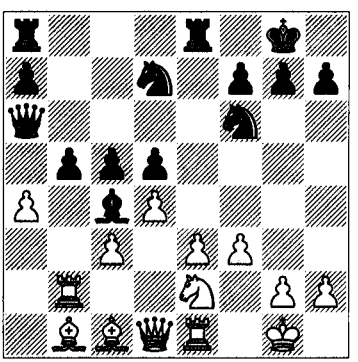
denies him that possibility: the light-squared bishop, he hopes, will play an important role when the f3 and e4 advance is carried out.

13...♗c4 14 ♖b2 ♕a6 15 ♖e1

This is not only a part of the general plan, but also conceals a shrewd tactical idea: if now 15...♕xa3 then White had in mind 16 ♖xb6 ♗xe2 17 ♖xe2 ♕xc3 18 ♗b2 ♕a5 19 ♖xf6, demolishing Black's kingside. 19...gxf6 20 dxc5 ♕xc5 (or 20...♘d7 21 ♕xd5) 21 ♕d3 leads to disaster for Black.

15...♘bd7 16 a4 b5 *(D)*

Gulko proposed 16...♕a5, provoking 17 ♗d2 and thereby interfering with White's strategic plan. Only then, he suggests, should Black prepare and carry out ...b5 after 17...♖ab8. It's a sound judgement, but the fact that nothing can stop the breakthrough in the centre remains Black's worry in any case.



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17 axb5 ♗xb5 18 ♘g3 ♘b6 19 e4 cxd4?!

19...♗a4 is stronger.

20 cxd4 ♘a4 21 ♖b3 dxe4?

21...♖ac8 is better. The exchange at e4 opens the d1-h5 diagonal and irreparably exposes the black kingside to White's powerful attacking forces.

22 fxe4 ♖ac8 23 e5 ♘d5 24 ♕h5 g6 25 ♕h6

White threatens 26 ♘h5 gxh5 27 ♗xh7+ with mate in two, and only bad solutions are left at Black's disposal.

25...f5 26 ♘xf5 ♖c7 27 ♘d6

Cutting off the black queen's influence along its third rank creates a new threat, 28 ♗xg6, and this provokes the following desperate sacrifice.

27...♕xd6 28 exd6 ♖xe1+ 29 ♔f2 ♖f7+ 30 ♖f3 ♖f1+ 31 ♔g3 ♘ac3

After 31...♖7xf3+ 32 gxf3 ♘ac3 there is 33 ♗d3 and the passed pawn decides.

32 ♖xf1 ♗xf1

32...♖xf1 is also refuted by 33 ♗xg6.

33 ♗xg6 ♘e2+ 34 ♔h4 ♖g7 35 ♗e4 1-0

An intrepid player of enterprising style, Ljubomir Ljubojević is the last Mohican to adopt this dubious continuation. Allowing White a mobile centre in these Nimzo-Indian lines is a risky undertaking. Facing the mobile advancing central pawns, Black has no firm points on which to build his defensive line and entrench himself. With the Queen's Gambit, as we have seen, it's quite another story. The games we examined illustrate the danger it represents and also its limits.

4 Pawn-Majorities and Minority Attacks

The two subjects in this chapter are obviously closely linked, since if one player has a pawn-majority on one wing, then his opponent has a pawn-minority on that same wing. Depending on the precise circumstances, it may be possible for either side to take action on the wing in question. We shall start with the more common case, where it is the side with the majority that is the aggressor.

Pawn-Majorities

While analysing the games so far we have encountered many positions characterized by pawn-majorities, but our emphasis was on other aspects of the struggle. Pawn-majorities occur with all types of centre, but with the dynamic centre they are a frequent and natural part of the scene. The reason lies primarily in the asymmetry of pawn-structures. In the Benoni, for instance, White achieves a majority on the kingside, Black on the queenside and their aspirations are based naturally on them. Paradoxically, in the Sicilian White's majority is on the queenside, where it is often viciously attacked by Black's pawn-minority, while White himself attacks on the kingside, where it is Black who has the pawn-majority. However, the Sicilian has a logic of its own, and in general we tend to wage battle on the side where we have a pawn surplus, with the ultimate aim of creating a passed pawn on that wing.

In the opening the pawn-majority is not felt as a major factor, but its significance grows rapidly through the middlegame, and often becomes decisive in the endgame. We shall observe that natural process in a number of illustrative games.

Botvinnik – Konstantinopolsky
Sverdlovsk 1943
Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 ♗g5 0-0 8 ♖c1

8 ♗d3 would allow 8...dxc4, transposing to an innocuous variation of the Queen's Gambit Accepted. In order to avoid this loss of a tempo, White leaves his bishop on f1 and instead prepares 9 c5. Of course, by choosing 8...dxc4 Black could now thwart this plan, but Konstantinopolsky, an expert on the Caro-Kann in those days, saw no reason to avoid it.

8...♘c6 9 c5 ♘e4

For a long time now Black has relied on this simplifying move.

10 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 11 ♗e2

In Ljubojević-Benko, Palma de Mallorca 1971, 11 ♗b5 turned out to be a blank shot in view of 11...♘g5 12 ♘xg5 ♕xg5 13 0-0 ♕f6.

11...♗d7

Black cannot free his game by 11...♘xc3 12 ♖xc3 e5 because of 13 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 14 ♖e3 f6 15 f4.

12 a3

Having created a pawn-majority on the queenside by 9 c5, White continues consistently.

12...f5?!

We might conclude that Black also responds consistently by activating his own pawn-majority, were it not for the hole it leaves on e5. Considering that, it is an ill-advised step.

13 ♗b5 ♘g5?

The alternative was 13...♘b8, but Black was sure he would equalize with the unstoppable ...e5 once the knights have been exchanged. It was poor judgement. In comparison with Ljubojević-Benko (see the note to White's 11th move), here ...♘g5 comes after a grave weakness has been created.

14 ♗xc6 ♘xf3+ 15 ♕xf3 bxc6 16 ♕f4

An essential point: White will not be able to stop ...e5, but he will meet it in favourable circumstances.

16...♖ae8 17 0-0 e5 18 ♕xe5 ♕xe5 19 dxe5 ♖xe5 20 f4!

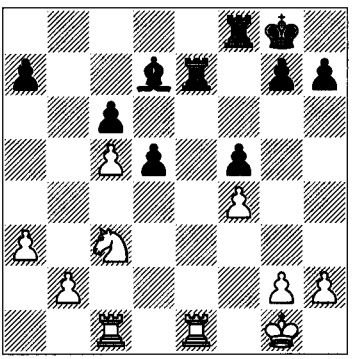
By blocking the black pawns on the squares of the light-squared bishop, White creates a strong central square for his knight.

20...♖e7

After 20...♖e3 21 ♔f2 ♖fe8 (or 21...d4 22 ♖cd1) 22 ♖fe1 d4 23 ♖xe3 dxe3+ 24 ♔f3 the pawn is lost.

21 ♖fe1 *(D)*

B



As the game moves deeper into an endgame, the importance of the queenside majority is emphasized.

21...♖fe8

Note that 21...♖xe1+ 22 ♖xe1 d4 does not work due to 23 ♘e2 ♖b8 24 ♖b1 (if 24 b4 then 24...d3 25 ♘d4 a5) 24...d3 25 ♘d4 followed by 26 b3 and the d3-pawn is lost.

22 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 23 ♔f2 ♔f7 24 ♖d1

Since 24 ♖e1 does not work due to 24...♖xe1 25 ♔xe1 d4 26 ♘e2 ♔e6, White will oppose Black's rook on the second rank.

24...♖e8

This was severely criticized and 24...♗e8 25 ♘e2 ♖e4 recommended instead, with the continuation 26 g3 ♖c4 27 b4 a5. However, 26 ♖d4 is stronger (if 26...♖e7 then 27 ♖a4).

25 ♖d2 h6 26 ♖e2 ♖b8 27 ♔e3 ♖b3 28 ♔d4 ♔f6 29 ♘a2

The blockade must be broken and the pawn-majority set in motion.

29...♖b8

29...a5 fails to stop the advance: 30 ♘c1 ♖b8 31 b3.

30 b4 g5

If 30...a5 then 31 bxa5 ♖a8 32 ♘c3 ♖xa5 33 a4.

31 g3 gxf4 32 gxf4 a6 33 ♘c3 ♖g8 34 a4 ♖g4 35 ♖f2 ♗e6

Keeping the bishop on the same diagonal does not prevent b5 because the d5-pawn is hanging.

36 b5 axb5 37 axb5 cxb5 38 ♘xb5

The majority has finally resulted in a passed c-pawn.

38...♖g1 39 ♘c3 ♔f7 40 ♖b2 ♖f1 41 ♘e2

Notice how efficient this knight is! It controls all the important squares and thwarts any meaningful counterplay.

41...♖e1

41...♔f6 42 c6 ♖f2 is too slow: 43 c7 ♖xh2 44 ♖b6 and the pawn will queen.

42 ♔e5 d4 43 ♔xd4 ♔g6 44 ♘c3 ♔h5 45 ♖e2 ♖xe2 46 ♘xe2 ♔g4 47 ♔e5 ♗c8 48 ♘d4 h5 49 ♘xf5 ♗d7 50 ♘g7 ♗a4 51 f5 ♔g5 52 ♘e6+ 1-0

The crystal-clear process of metamorphosis from pawn-majority to passed pawn makes this fine game highly instructive. In the end everything looks simple and clear, but it takes a highly disciplined chess mind to make it so. We shall proceed with the same theme. I would like to impress upon the reader that early in the game, when pawn-majorities appear on the board, we have to be fully aware of the latent threat they represent.

Gligorić – Filip
Zagreb 1975
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗e7 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 ♗g5 0-0 6 e3 h6 7 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 8 ♖c1

White often follows up the exchange on f6 with 8 ♕c2 or 8 ♕b3, planning to castle queenside and then attack on the kingside by the straightforward plan of g4, h4 and g5. In both cases, however, tournament practice warns that the counterblow ...c5 increases the strength of Black's unopposed dark-squared bishop. The text-move gives up the idea of castling queenside, but prevents ...c5 and uses the central pawn bulwark to limit the activity of the f6-bishop.

8...c6

Black accepts the task of finishing his basic development behind the pawn-wall. The more ambitious 8...b6 9 cxd5 exd5 10 ♗d3 ♗b7 11 0-0 ♕e7 was parried by 12 ♖e1 c5 13 e4 in Geller-Ivkov, Beverwijk 1965.

9 ♗d3 ♘d7 10 0-0 dxc4

The somewhat passive 10...b6 is possible, but Black probably disliked 11 e4 and correctly concluded that it was time to solve the problem of the light-squared bishop by opening up an exit for it.

11 ♗xc4 e5 12 ♘e4

Since 12 d5 is well met by 12...♘b6 13 ♗b3 e4 14 ♘xe4 ♗xb2 15 ♖c2 cxd5, White decides to eliminate the f6-bishop; this is a cautious approach.

In the 1980s Kasparov preferred 12 h3 in his title matches against Karpov, considering it was more important to limit the options of Black's light-squared bishop.

12...exd4 13 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6?!

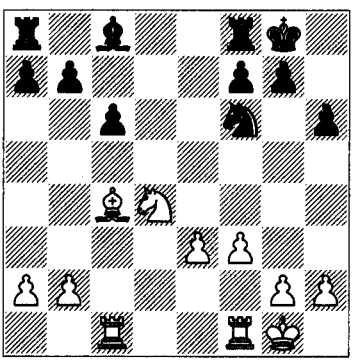
This move leads to the exchange of queens and seems logical. However, 13...♘xf6 14 ♕xd4 ♗g4, intending 15...♗xf3, would simplify things in a healthier manner and equalize.

14 ♕xd4 ♕xd4 15 ♘xd4 ♘f6

15...♖e8 opposes the planned advance with f3 and e4, but 16 b4 ♘f8 17 ♘b3, as in Chernin-Beliavsky, Candidates tournament, Montpellier 1985, demonstrates that Black's queenside will then be subjected to pressure.

16 f3 *(D)*

B



This simple move emphasizes that White has a kingside majority and that he will use it. The planned e4 will restrict Black's options and the centralized minor pieces constrain Black to passivity.

16...♗d7

16...a5 comes into consideration.

17 ♖fd1 ♖ad8

17...c5 18 ♘b5 ♗xb5 (or 18...a6 19 ♘c3 b5 20 ♘d5) 19 ♗xb5 a6 20 ♗f1 would not alleviate Black's difficulties.

18 e4 ♖fe8 19 b4!

Before activating his kingside majority, White takes care to control his opponent's queenside majority.

19...♗c8 20 ♗b3 a6

Black weakens his pawn-formation in order to prevent 21 b5.

21 ♔f2

The king enters the scene, anticipating simpler endgames, its natural field of action.

21...g6 22 ♘e2

The knight is bound, via c3 and a4, for c5, from where it will exert greater pressure on Black's position. At the same time ♖xd8 followed by e5 may come into consideration.

22...♗e6?

It is somewhat unusual that Filip, a patient player, should play such an impulsive move. In general, it is useful to exchange a passive bishop, but it is always unpleasant to split one's own pawns – a bad sign for the future. The exchange on e6 will cripple his pawn-structure. 22...♔f8 is better.

23 ♗xe6 fxe6 24 ♘f4

Now the knight can accomplish his journey with gain of tempo.

24...♔f7 25 ♘d3 ♘d7 26 ♘b2 ♘b6

Black prevents ♘c4, but only temporarily.

27 a4 ♔e7 28 a5 ♖xd1 29 ♖xd1 ♘d7 30 ♘a4 ♖f8 31 ♘c5 ♘xc5 32 bxc5

The long, subtle plan has been carried out to its logical conclusion. White did not hurry to exploit his pawn-majority on the kingside, but first shrewdly immobilized his opponent's majority on the other side. We can already say that Black is lost. Firstly, because the lower level of endgame is lost (note: that is crucial for endgame assessments in 90 percent of cases). In addition, the b7-pawn requires constant care.

32...♖f7 33 ♔e3 ♔f6 34 h4 h5 35 ♔f4 e5+

Such moves are played only when there is no choice. With the sixth rank now open, the winning process runs smoothly.

36 ♔e3 ♔g7 37 g3 ♖c7 38 f4

Finally a passed pawn is born – a portentous sign!

38...exf4+ 39 gxf4 ♔f6 40 ♖d6+ ♔g7 41 e5 ♔f7 42 ♔e4 ♔g7 43 f5 gxf5+ 44 ♔xf5 1-0

It is a long journey from the creation of a pawn-majority to the birth of a passed pawn. Grandmaster Gligorić achieved the aim masterfully. One sees how small imprecisions and subtle reactions can convert an apparently innocuous pawn-majority into a winning force.

Najdorf – Kotov

Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953
Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♗f5 5 ♘g3 ♗g6 6 ♘f3 ♘d7 7 ♗d3

Today it is rare to see this variation without h4 included, but objectively it is not clear whether capturing space on the kingside brings White anything palpable.

7...♘gf6 8 0-0 e6 9 ♖e1 ♗e7

Matulović used to play 9...♗d6, refusing to cede the h2-b8 diagonal to White.

10 c4 0-0

The routine 10...♕c7 is also possible.

11 ♗xg6 hxg6 12 ♗f4 ♖e8 13 ♕c2 c5 14 ♖ad1 cxd4 15 ♘xd4 ♗b4

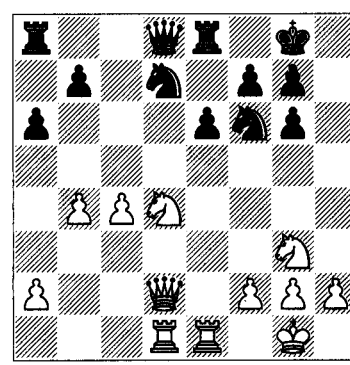
A good simplifying move. In general, it is the squeezed, passive side which seeks relief through exchanges. Kotov happens to be in such a position.

16 ♗d2 ♗xd2 17 ♕xd2 a6

This move is necessary in view of the threatened 18 ♘b5. Moreover, the a6-b7 structure is as a rule the most effective in opposing this type of queenside pawn-majority.

18 b4 *(D)*

B



There can be no doubt that White's chances lie with his majority and Najdorf does not hesitate.

18...♕c7 19 ♖c1 ♖ad8 20 ♕c3 ♘b6

The alternative was 20...♘b8 followed by moving the knight to c6, but White then continues 21 ♘b3, when 21...♘c6 can be unpleasantly met by 22 b5. The knight does look somewhat clumsy at b6, but it controls a4, exerts pressure on the c4-pawn and whenever the c-pawn is pushed forward the knight will jump happily to d5.

21 ♘f3 ♕f4

In my opinion 21...♖c8 is better.

22 ♕e3 ♕xe3

Perhaps even 22...♕c7 should be preferred, although it is understandable that Black is reluctant to go back, probably feeling that his problems will be less in a rook and minor-piece ending. My assessment is the opposite: the exchange of queens does not favour Black.

23 ♖xe3 ♖c8 24 ♖ec3 ♖ed8 25 ♔f1 ♔f8 26 ♔e2 ♔e7 27 a3 ♖c7 28 ♖3c2 ♖dc8 29 ♔d3 ♘fd7

Black embarks on an ambitious plan. The cautious 29...♖d7+ 30 ♔e2 ♖dc7 31 ♘d2 g5 looks logical.

30 ♘f1 f5?! 31 ♘e3 e5 32 ♘d2 e4+ 33 ♔e2 ♘e5?

White has been shrewdly biding his time before advancing the c4-pawn. In contrast, Black reacts aggressively and forgets the crucial fact that the d5-square is no longer adequately covered. Besides, the head of his pawn-chain at e4 is susceptible to the undermining f3. 33...♘f6 seems to me indispensable.

34 c5 ♘d3 35 ♖d1 ♘f4+

This is grist to White's mill, but 35...♔e6 36 g3 is not a pleasure either, since 37 f3 is hanging over Black's head.

36 ♔f1 ♔e6?

To avoid the worst, 36...♔f7 was indispensable.

37 ♘xe4 ♘d7 38 ♘d6 ♖h8 39 g3 ♘h3 40 ♘d5 ♖c6 41 ♖e2+ 1-0

Here White had a typical queenside majority but he did not have to go all the way through the process of transformation. His pawns were a constant menace and he slowly prepared their advance. Black, on the contrary, had no patience. His position expanded like a balloon until it burst.

Salov – Karpov
Wijk aan Zee 1998
Queen's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 g3 ♗a6 5 ♘bd2 ♗b7 6 ♗g2 c5

Black invested a whole tempo to provoke ♘bd2, which leaves the knight poorly placed to control the centre. As a result, Black is able to make this side-blow against the pawn-centre.

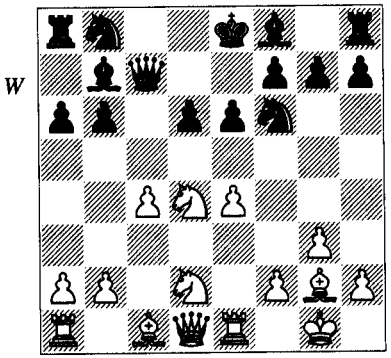
7 e4

White insists on creating a pawn-centre. This move is available due to the subtle tactics after 7...♘xe4? 8 ♘e5 ♘c3 9 ♕h5 g6 10 ♕h3.

7...cxd4 8 0-0 d6 9 ♘xd4 a6 10 ♖e1 ♕c7 *(D)*

The hasty 10...♘bd7 would overlook 11 e5 ♗xg2 12 exf6 ♗b7 13 fxg7 ♗xg7 14 ♘e4 ♗xe4 15 ♖xe4 0-0 16 ♖g4 with an advantage for White.

We have now reached a hedgehog position, a subject we discuss more fully in Chapter 5. At first glance



White's options look even more limited and inferior. Indeed, if White continues with the routine b3 and ♗b2, etc., he can expect to accomplish little. The crucial question is always whether White can come up with some meaningful plan. What Salov finds is very interesting and meaningful.

11 a4!

Having achieved a lead in development, White activates his queenside majority – an unexpected but consistent decision.

11...♘c6 12 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 13 a5

The d2-square is not such a bad place for the knight after all!

13...♖b8?!

In case of 13...bxa5 there is 14 ♘b3 recapturing the pawn. Nevertheless, 14...♖b8 15 ♘xa5 ♗a8 is then more palatable for Black than the game continuation.

14 axb6 ♕xb6 15 ♖e3

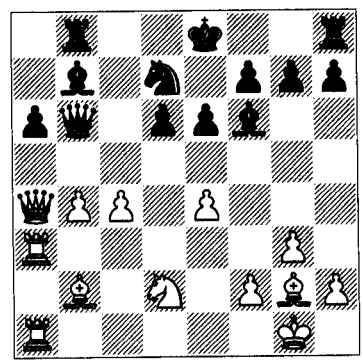
At a moment when Black still requires a few moves to complete his development, White uses the vacant third rank to activate his forces further.

15...♘d7 16 ♖b3 ♕a7 17 ♖ba3

The simpler 17 ♖xb8+ ♘xb8 18 b4 is also dangerous in view of Black's poor development. 18...♕b6 19 b5 axb5 20 cxb5 is quite unpleasant for Black.

17...♗b7 18 b4 ♕b6 19 ♕a4 ♗e7 20 ♗b2 ♗f6? *(D)*

With a sequence of strong, consistent moves, White has pushed his opponent to the brink of defeat. As so often happens when a player is under strong pressure, Black commits suicide. 20...e5 was indispensable.



21 e5!

The d7-knight being pinned, Black is vulnerable at e5.

21...♗xe5

If Black plays 21...dxe5, then the c-pawn marches victoriously up the file: 22 c5 ♕c7 23 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 24 c6 ♘b6 25 ♕xa6 ♕xc6 26 ♘c4 ♖b8 27 ♘xb6 ♖xb6 28 ♕a8+ ♗d8 29 ♖d1, etc.

22 c5 ♕c7

22...♕b5 loses to 23 ♕xb5 axb5 24 ♗xe5 ♗xg2 25 ♗xd6, etc.

23 ♗xe5 dxe5 24 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 25 c6 ♘b6 26 ♕xa6 ♕xc6

Or 26...♖b8 27 ♕a7.

27 ♘c4 ♖b8 28 ♘xb6 0-0 29 ♘c4 ♕e4 30 ♖e3 ♕d5 31 ♘xe5 ♖xb4 32 ♕d3 1-0

A fine idea based on the pawn-majority triumphed. In the following game Tal discovers the same recipe after more dramatic opening events...

Tal – Portisch
European Team Ch, Oberhausen 1961
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 g6 6 ♗e3 ♗g7 7 f3 0-0 8 ♕d2 ♘c6 9 ♗c4 ♘xd4 10 ♗xd4 ♗e6

White's light-squared bishop, developed at c4 and then usually dropped back to b3, plays a double role. It can take part in attacks, but it is primarily there to thwart counterplay in the centre and strengthen White's queenside defences. In a certain period of exploration it dawned upon Black that perhaps the early exchange at d4 would permit Black to oppose the b3-bishop by ...♗e6 and so neutralize it.

11 ♗b3

Black has no reason to fear 11 ♗xe6 fxe6, when 12 e5 dxe5 13 ♗xe5 ♕xd2+ 14 ♔xd2 ♖fd8+ 15 ♔e2 ♖ac8 satisfies Black.

11...♕a5 12 0-0-0 b5 13 ♔b1 ♖fc8?!

Black responds to the threat of 14 ♘d5, but he could do it in a more consistent manner by 13...b4. Then 14 ♘d5 ♗xd5 15 exd5 ♕b5 16 ♕d3 ♕b7 17 ♖he1 a5 18 ♗a4 is still in White's favour but eases the defence.

14 ♖he1 ♗xb3

Now 14...b4 15 ♘d5 ♗xd5 16 exd5 ♖c7 17 a4 is advantageous for White.

15 cxb3 b4 16 ♗xf6

16 ♘d5 ♘xd5 17 ♗xg7 does not work because of 17...♘e3.

16...bxc3 17 ♗xc3 ♗xc3

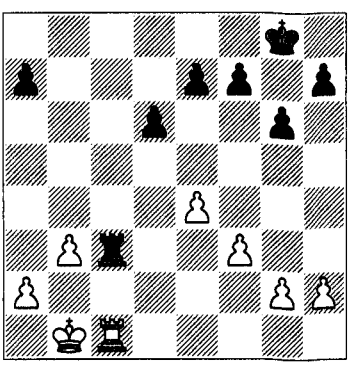
Note that 17...♖xc3 fails to 18 ♖e2.

18 bxc3 ♖xc3

18...♕xc3 19 ♕xc3 ♖xc3 20 ♖c1 does not change the essence of the position.

19 ♖e3 ♖ac8 20 ♖xc3 ♕xc3 21 ♕xc3 ♖xc3 22 ♖c1 *(D)*

B



22...♖e3

Black reluctantly cedes the c-file, having come to the conclusion that the endgame arising after 22...♖xc1+ 23 ♔xc1 is lost. Obviously the whole variation depends upon the assessment of this position characterized by two majorities. It is not difficult to conclude that White is better. There are many pawns on the kingside and it is a difficult task to produce a passed pawn in that sector. To create a passed pawn on the queenside is, on the contrary,

relatively simple, and that matters. White's plan is obvious: first centralize his king and advance the a- and b-pawns, tying down the black king by the threat of creating a passed pawn. Then by sacrificing a pawn, White will penetrate Black's camp and pick up unprotected pawns one after the other. Let us see what barriers stand in the way. For example: 23...♔f8 24 ♔c2 ♔e8 25 ♔c3 ♔d7 26 b4 ♔c6 27 ♔c4 e6 28 g4 and then:

a) If 28...g5, then 29 b5+ ♔b6 30 ♔b4 h6 31 h3 f6 32 a3 ♔c7 33 ♔a5 ♔b7 34 a4 ♔b8 35 b6 ♔b7 36 bxa7 ♔xa7 37 ♔b5 and by sacrificing the a-pawn White will penetrate to c6 and win.

b) 28...♔b6 29 g5 ♔c6 30 a4 ♔b6 31 f4 ♔c6 and now:

b1) We shall see that 32 b5+! is necessary to drive the king further from d5 or penetrate in the same manner as in line 'a'.

b2) 32 ♔d4?! ♔b6 33 ♔d3 ♔c6 34 ♔e3 ♔b6 35 f5 a5? (also weak is 35...♔c6? 36 f6 ♔b6 37 ♔d4 ♔c6 38 ♔c3 ♔b6 39 ♔c4 ♔c6 40 b5+ ♔c7 41 ♔b4 ♔b6 42 h3 ♔c7 43 ♔a5 ♔b7 44 h4, etc., but after 35...gxf5! 36 exf5 exf5 37 ♔f4 ♔c6 38 ♔xf5 ♔d5 39 ♔f6 ♔c4 the passed pawn is quick and it becomes apparent why the black king had to be driven from c6) 36 b5 ♔c5 37 f6 ♔b6 38 ♔f3 ♔c5 39 ♔g4 ♔b6 40 h3 ♔c5 41 h4 ♔b6 42 h5 ♔c5 43 h6 ♔b6 44 ♔f4 ♔c5 45 ♔e3 ♔b6 46 ♔d4 ♔b7 47 e5 d5 48 ♔c5 ♔c7 49 b6+ ♔b7 50 ♔d6 d4 51 ♔e7 d3 52 ♔xf7 d2 53 ♔g7 d1♕ 54 f7 and White will promote two pawns. We see now why it was necessary to advance the pawns to f6 and h6. Several months after Tal and Portisch played their game in Oberhausen, this method of winning was demonstrated in the game Nedeljković-Volpert in the traditional match USSR-Yugoslavia on the first women's board. As a matter of fact the process, albeit marred by errors, lasted longer because having reached a won position Vera Nedeljković was advised to play neutral moves and wait for the adjournment and good seconds to solve the issue. Portisch found a less excruciating manner to lose...

23 ♖c7 a5 24 ♔b2 ♔f8 25 ♖c3 ♖e1 26 ♖c1 ♖e3 27 ♖c8+ ♔g7 28 ♖c3 ♖e1 29 a3 ♔f6 30 b4 axb4 31 axb4 ♔e6 32 b5 1-0

Early on in this line of the Dragon, Black is confronted with an apparently manageable pawn-majority in various systems and is ready to accept a defensive role. However, tournament practice often sends us warning signals. I thought it might be useful to turn your attention to these positions which in the past century were in turn popular, then abandoned, only to be rediscovered again.

Euwe – Thomas
Hastings 1934/5
Queen's Gambit

1 c4 e6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 d4 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♘f3 ♘bd7 7 ♖c1 c6 8 ♗d3 dxc4 9 ♗xc4 ♘d5

In Capablanca's system Black develops behind a strong pawn-wall, but sooner or later he must solve the basic

problem of his position – how to develop the light-squared bishop, which is hemmed in by the pawn-formation. The text-move simplifies the position through exchanges and in the end creates the desired exit for the bishop.

10 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 11 0-0 ♘xc3 12 ♖xc3

12 bxc3 c5, followed by a fianchetto of the queen's bishop, gives Black pleasant counterplay.

12...e5

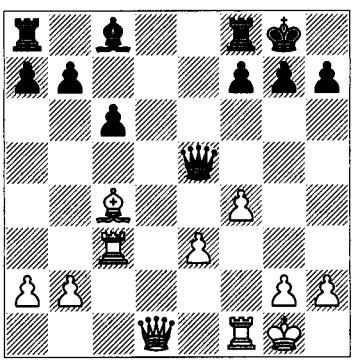
Since 13 d5 would now be agreeably met by 13...e4 14 ♘d4 c5 15 ♘b5 ♘f6, the c8-bishop has finally found a way out.

13 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 14 dxe5 ♕xe5

Black now intends 15...♗e6, which would obviously equalize.

15 f4 *(D)*

B



As far as I can ascertain, Rubinstein was the first to play this continuation, in a display game with live pieces against Lasker in Berlin 1924. White sets in motion his pawn-majority and seizes the initiative at the slight cost of creating a backward pawn at e3.

15...♕e7?!

The logic of chess is deceptive. Black wishes to monitor the e3-pawn instead of paying more attention to the f4-pawn, whose advance will cause grave difficulties. In case of 15...♕e4 16 ♕e2 ♗f5 (or 16...♖e8 17 ♗d3 followed by 18 ♗b1) 17 ♗d3 ♕d5 18 e4 ♕d4+ 19 ♕f2 ♕xf2+ 20 ♔xf2 the endgame favours White. In my opinion Black's best option is 15...♕f6. There is no reason to fear 16 e4, when after 16...♗e6 17 ♗d3 (or 17 e5 ♕e7 18 ♗d3 f5) 17...♕d4+ 18 ♔h1 ♖ad8, 19 f5 does not work due to 19...♗c4. 16 f5 should worry Black more, when I am inclined to accept Trifunović's old recommendation 16...a5 17 a4 ♖b8.

16 f5!

Obvious but strong. White keeps the c8-bishop out of play while planning to break up Black's kingside with f6.

16...b5

Black has to resort to unusual steps, since 16...♖d8 17 f6 gxf6 (17...♖xd1 18 fxe7 ♖xf1+ 19 ♗xf1 ♗f5 loses to 20 e4) 18 ♕h5 ♗e6 19 ♗d3 f5 20 e4 opens up the position of the black king.

17 ♗b3 b4 18 f6 gxf6 19 ♖xc6 ♕xe3+ 20 ♔h1 ♗b7

20...f5 is too passive and after 21 ♕h5 the black king is badly exposed.

21 ♖cxf6 ♕e4 22 ♕d2 ♔h8 23 ♗xf7

23 ♖6f4, proposed by Neishtadt, looks stronger. For instance, 23...♖ad8 24 ♕f2 ♕c6 25 ♖xb4.

23...♖ac8?!

A lost tempo in a critical situation. 23...♖ad8 24 ♕g5 ♕d4 comes into consideration.

24 ♖6f2 ♖cd8

Better is 24...♕g4. Due to the weak back rank, 24...♖c7 would lose to 25 ♗c4.

25 ♕g5 ♖d6

25...♕d4 does not work any more because of the same brutal blow.

26 ♗d5! 1-0

Shirov – I. Sokolov

Sarajevo 1999

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♘f6 4 0-0 ♘xe4 5 d4 ♘d6 6 ♗xc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 ♘f5 8 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8

In the opening moves Black has chosen to enter a position where he is practically a pawn down. In addition he has given up the right to castle, but his position has nevertheless been considered impenetrable by numerous experts in the Ruy Lopez. The fact is that making use of the kingside majority represents a difficult task for White, but there is no doubt that Black's task is not enviable either.

9 ♘c3

Some players prefer 9 ♖d1+ in the belief that the black king should be kept in the centre.

9...♔e8

After 9...♗e6 10 ♘g5 ♗c4 11 ♖d1+ ♔c8 12 b3 ♗b4 13 ♗b2 ♗xc3 14 ♗xc3 ♗d5 15 ♘h3 h5 16 ♘f4 ♗e6 17 ♖d3 b6 18 ♗d2 ♔b7 19 ♘xe6 fxe6 20 ♗g5 White had a better endgame in Dvoirys-Aleksandrov, Moscow 1996. 9...♗d7 10 b3 h6 11 ♗b2 ♔c8 12 ♖ad1 b6 13 ♘e2 c5 gave White a small advantage in Kasparov-Kramnik, BGN World Ch match (game 3), London 2000. In game 11 of the same match, Kramnik resorted to 9...h6 10 ♖d1+ ♔e8 11 h3 a5, when 12 ♗f4 ♗e6 13 g4 ♘e7 14 ♘d4 ♘d5 15 ♘ce2 ♗c5 16 ♘xe6 fxe6 17 c4 ♘b6 18 b3 was advantageous to White.

10 h3

In older games White, in expectation of ...♗e6, often resorted to the manoeuvre ♘e2-f4. Shirov's move is an old choice as well and also directed against ...♗e6.

10...a5

Parma-Bukal, Sarajevo 1970 continued 10...♗e6 11 g4 ♘e7 12 ♘d4 ♗c4 13 ♖d1 ♘d5 14 ♘e4 c5 15 ♘f5 and Black thought that 15...♘b4 turned the situation in his favour, but he was struck by the devastating 16 ♗h6!.

The text-move has been favoured by Zoltan Almasi. Black seeks counterchances by seizing space on the queenside. Black was dissatisfied with the 'normal' 10...h6 11 ♗f4 ♗e7 12 ♖ad1 ♗e6 13 b3 ♖d8 14 g4 ♘h4 15 ♘xh4 ♗xh4, because, for instance, 16 ♘e2 c5 17 c4 ♗e7 18 ♗e3 h5 19 ♘f4 gives White the better chances in the endgame, Korneev-Skochkov, Russia Cup, Krasnodar 1998. In my opinion the flexible 10...♘e7 is called for, with the intention of 11 ♖e1 ♘g6 12 ♘e4 h6.

11 ♗f4

The f4-square is the best place for the bishop and is in harmony with the

previous move. 11 ♘e2 ♘e7 12 ♘g3 (or 12 ♖e1 ♘d5 13 a3 c5) 12...a4, as in Svidler-Aleksandrov, FIDE Knock-out, Las Vegas 1999, puts less pressure on Black.

11...♗e6

11...a4 would also be answered by 12 a3, a useful move directed especially against ...♗b4xc3, which in general works well for Black.

The text-move tries to provoke 12 g4 ♘e7 13 ♘d4 ♘d5 14 ♘xe6 fxe6, when 15 ♗d2 is met by 15...♗b4 16 ♘xd5 cxd5, but 15 ♘e2 should be considered.

12 a3 ♗c5

The d4-square is under surveillance, while e7 is kept for the knight. The alternative is 12...♗e7, securing h4 in case the f5-knight is attacked, although this plan has not brought Black much success in practice.

13 ♖ad1 h6

One of the things we learn quickly about this variation is that covering the g5-square is much more important than securing the place of the f5-knight by ...h5. The g5-square then is invariably used by White's minor pieces to his clear advantage.

14 g4 ♘e7 15 ♘d4 ♗xd4

In case of 15...♘d5 White planned 16 ♘xe6 fxe6 17 ♘e2. If 15...♗c4 then 16 ♖fe1 ♘d5 17 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 18 ♘f5 is also pleasant for White.

16 ♖xd4 c5 17 ♖d2 ♘c6 18 ♘d5 ♗xd5?

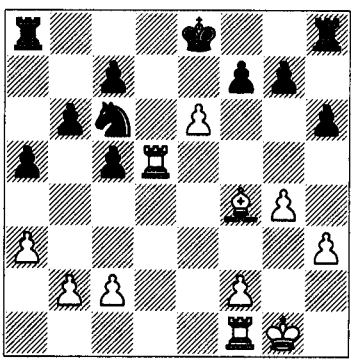
Further exchanges risk opening the position in favour of the more active white pieces. Therefore 18...♖c8 was indispensable.

19 ♖xd5 b6

Unfortunately necessary, as 19...♘d4 20 ♗e3 ♘e6 21 f4 must be avoided.

20 e6! *(D)*

B



It was in the hope of this thrust that the bishop was posted at f4. I remember some old games in which the e-pawn was successfully exchanged for the c7-pawn, when the position opened to White's advantage. In our case the exchanges will accentuate the strength of the superior bishop versus knight and the growing importance of the pawn-majority.

20...fxe6 21 ♖e1 ♖d8

On 21...♘d4 22 ♔g2 c6 23 ♖d6 ♖f8 24 ♗g3 ♔e7 Shirov gives 25 ♖d1! ♖fd8 26 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 27 ♗c7 ♖d5 28 ♗xb6 ♘xc2 29 ♖c1 ♘d4 30 ♖xc5 with advantage.

22 ♖xe6+ ♔f7 23 ♖xd8 ♘xd8 24 ♖e3 ♘e6 25 ♗e5

White has achieved a transition into a simpler endgame in which he has all the trumps: the superior bishop, the mobile majority, the rook in control of the open file if necessary.

25...h5

Since 25...♖d8 26 ♖d3 helps White, this is the remaining alternative.

26 ♖d3 hxg4 27 hxg4 c4 28 ♖d1 ♔e7 29 ♔g2 ♖f8 30 ♔g3 g5 31 f3 ♖f7 32 ♔f2

32 ♖h1 also wins.

32...♖h7 33 ♔e3 ♖h3 34 ♖d2 ♖h1 35 ♔e4 ♖f1

Or 35...♖e1+ 36 ♔f5 and 37 ♗f6+ will decide.

36 ♖h2 ♔d7 37 ♖h7+ ♔c6 38 ♖h6 ♔d7 39 ♖h7+ ♔c6 40 ♔f5 ♘c5 41 ♖h3 ♖f2 42 ♔xg5 ♖xc2 43 ♖h2 ♖xh2 44 ♗xh2 ♘d3 45 ♔h6 b5 46 g5 b4 47 g6 c3 48 bxc3 b3 49 g7 b2 50 g8♕ b1♕ 51 ♕a8+ ♔d7 52 ♕d5+ ♔e7 53 ♗xc7 ♕c1+ 54 ♔g6 1-0

Fischer – Unzicker

Olympiad, Siegen 1970

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗xc6 dxc6

More than half a century had passed since Emanuel Lasker won his famous game versus Capablanca in the St Petersburg tournament of 1914, when another great champion, Robert Fischer, revived the almost forgotten 'drawish' Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez and scored a series of impressive victories against formidable opposition. In ceding the bishop-pair to his opponent, White bases his plan on the fragile advantage of the kingside pawn-majority.

5 0-0 f6 6 d4 exd4

For a period of time in the 1960s, 6...♗g4 was considered bad, but later experience improved its reputation. Several games, including Van der Wiel-P.Nikolić, Dutch Ch, Rotterdam 1998, have continued 7 dxe5 ♕xd1 8 ♖xd1 fxe5 9 ♖d3 ♗d6 10 ♘bd2 ♘f6 11 b3 0-0-0 12 ♗b2 ♖he8 with approximately level play.

7 ♘xd4 ♘e7?!

This slow manoeuvre will not do. 7...c5 is more natural, although due to the weakening of the d5-square some difficulties persist. Glek-Emelin, Russian Ch, St Petersburg 1998 continued 8 ♘e2 ♕xd1 9 ♖xd1 ♗d7 10 ♗e3 0-0-0 11 ♘bc3 ♖e8 12 ♖d2 ♗c6 13 ♖ad1 b6 14 f3 ♘e7 15 ♘f4 ♘g6 16 ♘cd5.

8 ♗e3 ♘g6 9 ♘d2 ♗d6 10 ♘c4 0-0 11 ♕d3

By vacating the first rank to activate his rooks, White increases his power in the centre. The queen is well positioned at d3, as it supports the e4-pawn, while the possibility of ♕b3 may come in handy.

11...♘e5 12 ♘xe5 ♗xe5

12...fxe5 allows 13 ♕b3+ ♔h8 14 ♘e6 ♗xe6 15 ♕xe6 – reducing material is in line with White's aims.

13 f4 ♗d6

With 13...♗xd4 14 ♗xd4 f5 Black rests his hopes on the opposite-coloured bishops, but 15 ♕b3+ ♔h8 16 ♖ad1 ♕e8 17 exf5 favours White: his majority on the kingside tells and his bishop is superior.

14 f5! *(D)*

Lasker used this device to obstruct Black's light-squared bishop in the aforementioned encounter with Capablanca, albeit in a somewhat different

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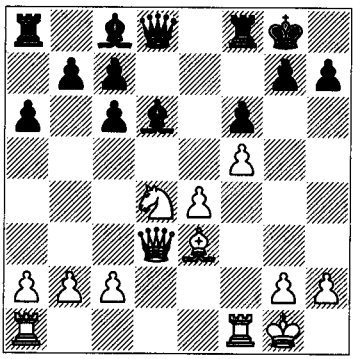


position. At the same time the pawn-majority grows in significance.

14...♕e7 15 ♗f4 ♗xf4 16 ♖xf4 ♗d7 17 ♖e1

Let's mention in passing that 17 ♕b3+ ♔h8 18 ♕xb7? does not work because of 18...♕d6, when the queen is trapped on b7.

17...♕c5?!

Better is 17...c5.

18 c3 ♖ae8 19 g4

The pawn surplus on the kingside acquires new impetus.

19...♕d6 20 ♕g3 ♖e7?!

Again 20...c5 looks more natural.

21 ♘f3 c5

Now it is too late. The breakthrough in the centre will yield a substantial advantage.

22 e5! fxe5 23 ♖fe4 ♗c6 24 ♖xe5 ♖fe8 25 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 26 ♘e5

The other rook will keep the white king in security.

26...h6

This slows down White's advance, but creates another weakness in the pawn-structure.

27 h4 ♗d7

As a matter of fact 27...♕d5 would threaten just a useless check.

28 ♕f4 ♕f6 29 ♖e2

A nice little solution: the h4-pawn is indirectly defended by 30 ♘g6.

29...♗c8 30 ♕c4+ ♔h7 31 ♘g6 ♖xe2 32 ♕xe2 ♗d7

32...♕d6 would resist longer, but in vain. Under the protection of the queen and the e5-knight, the white king will move forward and support the g5 advance. The text-move allows White to finish with a couple of nice points.

33 ♕e7 ♕xe7 34 ♘xe7 g5 35 hxg5 hxg5 36 ♘d5 ♗c6 37 ♘xc7 ♗f3 38 ♘e8 ♔h6 39 ♘f6 ♔g7 40 ♔f2 ♗d1 41 ♘d7 c4

41...♗xg4 does not work because of 42 f6+ ♔g8 43 f7+, etc.

1-0

The succinct lesson of these games warns us that the pawn-majority is a significant factor which should not be underrated even in positions that have for a long time had a drawish reputation, especially when one side manages to set his majority in motion while the opponent's majority on the other wing remains dormant. However, those games in which both sides can simultaneously activate their majorities prove to be more risky and unclear.

Pomar – Fischer

Olympiad, Havana 1966

Modern Benoni

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 g6 6 e4 d6 7 ♗e2 ♗g7 8 f4 0-0

We have reached a position from the Four Pawns Attack of the King's Indian Defence via a Benoni move-order. Thus in the early phase of the game two majorities have formed: White's on the kingside, Black's on the queenside. A very delicate and unstable position has been created after only eight moves. The crucial question remains who will be the first to make use of his majority.

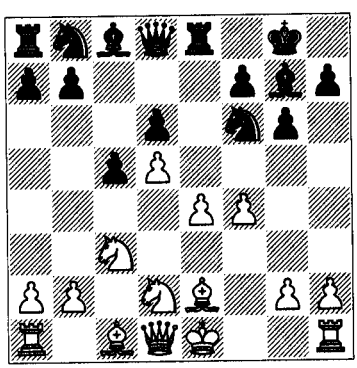
9 ♘f3 ♖e8

In this tense position Black can dissuade his opponent from the obviously intended 10 e5 by 9...♗g4, when 10 e5 ♗xf3 11 ♗xf3 dxe5 12 fxe5 ♘fd7 13 e6 ♘e5 results in fine play for Black. 9...b5 is a sharper alternative.

The text-move provokes the central thrust, but Pomar does not accept the challenge.

10 ♘d2 *(D)*

B



By playing this move, White does not give up his initial idea, but postpones it. He defends the e4-pawn, planning to castle and then after further preparation to move the king's knight to c4 and carry out the e5 advance at a later stage. It may prove sound but it is certainly neither consistent nor courageous.

10...c4!?

This is one of the sharp Benoni variations that Fischer played with deep understanding and much success. Having finished his basic development, he engages White in a sharp contest by using his pawn-majority in a risky but deeply consistent manner. Boleslavsky instead sought counterplay with 10...♘g4, another complex continuation in contrast with the quiet 10...b6 planning 11...♗a6.

11 ♗f3

Another game in the same event, Padevsky-Ciocaltea, Olympiad, Havana 1966, featured an important improvement. White continued 11 a4, cutting off pawn support to the exposed c4-pawn. Then 11...♘bd7 12 0-0 ♘c5 13 ♗f3 ♗h6 14 ♕c2 appeared to question Black's whole idea because 14...♗xf4 fails to 15 ♘xc4. However, Boleslavsky analysed 14...♘d3 15 ♘xc4 ♘xc1 16 ♕xc1 ♗g4 17 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 18 ♕d1 f5 19 h3 ♖c8, when the struggle continues.

11...♘bd7 12 0-0?

There was still time to transpose to Padevsky-Ciocaltea by 12 a4. By castling, White allows Black to mobilize his queenside pawn-majority to the maximum degree.

12...b5 13 ♔h1 a6 14 a4 ♖b8 15 axb5 axb5 16 e5

Finding himself in trouble all of a sudden, White tries to use his majority as a counterweight.

16...dxe5 17 ♘de4 ♘xe4 18 ♘xe4 ♘f6

A very simple and efficient defence. White's pawn-thrust is insufficiently supported by his pieces (note especially the passive position of the dark-squared bishop).

19 d6 ♗e6 20 ♘c5 e4!

Another excellent solution: by giving back material, Black attains a position in which his bishops are vastly superior to White's, and his pawn-majority has become a very concrete menace.

21 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 22 ♗xe4 ♕b6 23 f5

Although this move is inadequate, there was nothing better, as the d6-pawn is in danger.

23...gxf5 24 ♗c2

In case of 24 ♗xf5 ♗xf5 25 ♖xf5 there is 25...♕xd6.

24...♕d4 25 ♕h5 ♕g4 26 ♕xg4 fxg4 27 ♗g5

This makes Black's task easier, but the battle has already been decided.

27...♗xb2 28 ♖ad1 b4 29 d7 ♖ed8 30 ♗a4 b3 31 ♖fe1 ♔g7 32 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 33 ♖d6 ♗f6 34 ♖ed1 ♗g5 35 ♖b6 h6 36 ♖c6 ♖a8 37 ♗b5 ♗xd7 38 h4 ♗xc6 39 ♗xc6 c3 40 hxg5 c2 41 gxh6+ ♔h8 0-1

Marović – Ljubojević

Rovinj/Zagreb 1975

Modern Benoni

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 g6 6 ♘f3 ♗g7 7 g3 0-0 8 ♗g2 d6 9 0-0 a6 10 a4

Again, White has the kingside majority, while Black has an extra pawn on the queenside. In the next phase both sides try to set their respective majorities in motion and at the same time to thwart or at least delay their opponent's play. 10 a4 is a part of the strategy.

10...♘bd7 11 ♘d2 ♖e8

11...♘e8 renounces the idea of exerting pressure on the e-file, but prepares to oppose the expected 12 ♘c4 and plans to seize space on the kingside by 12...f5. After 12 h3 ♖b8 13 ♘c4 ♘b6 14 ♘e3 ♗d7 15 ♖e1 ♘c8 16 a5 ♘a7 17 ♗d2 ♘b5 18 ♘c4 White had the better of it in Marović-Hartoch, Basle 1971. He has managed to block Black's majority on the queenside, carry out the strategic manoeuvre ♘d2-c4 and prepare an advance on the kingside.

12 h3 ♖b8 13 ♘c4

13 a5 is hasty, as 13...b5 14 axb6 ♘xb6 denies the enemy knight the c4-square.

13...♘b6 14 ♘e3

During the game I recalled my game versus Hartoch. Besides, I was not too optimistic about the popular continuation 14 ♘a3 ♗d7, when by vacating the c8-square Black prepares ...♘c8-a7-b5, in addition to the tactical solution ...♘xa4, ♘xa4 b5. Then 15 ♗f4 ♘h5 16 ♗xd6 fails to 16...♗xc3 17 ♗xb8 ♗xb2 18 g4 ♕xb8 19 gxh5 ♘xa4 20 ♖a2 ♘c3 21 ♕b3 ♘xe2+ 22 ♔h1 ♗g7, when White was lost in Hort-Marović, Banja Luka 1974. I was not impressed by 15 a5 ♘c8 16 ♘c4 either, when 16...♗b5 17 ♕b3 ♗xc4 18 ♕xc4 ♘d7 offers Black fine counterplay, as was demonstrated in

the game Liberzon-Yusupov, Lone Pine 1981. Apart from that, two days before this game was played, Ljubojević and Hulak met and their game continued 15 e4 ♘c8 16 ♕d3 ♕c7 17 ♗e3, when the energetic 17...c4 18 ♕xc4 ♕xc4 19 ♘xc4 b5 20 ♘d2 b4 gave Black strong counterplay. White did not manage to control Black's queenside play. Without doing so, naturally, his own prospects of using his kingside majority to carry out the central thrust e5 were not realistic. Therefore I turned to 14 ♘e3 for help.

14...♗d7 15 ♗d2

Before a5 is played some preconditions must be fulfilled.

15...♖e7?!

I can think of very few occasions when it is effective for Black to double his major pieces on the e-file in the Benoni. In our case it is rather unnatural and we shall soon see why. I remember vividly that when playing 14 ♘e3 I was afraid of 15...♘h5, followed by 16...f5, and that was the path to take.

16 ♕c2 ♕e8 17 ♖fe1 ♖d8?

Black's position cannot bear this second loss of time. 17...♘c8 was indispensable.

18 a5 ♘c8 19 ♘c4 ♗b5 20 b3! *(D)*

Now the idea behind the useful preparatory moves 15 ♗d2, 16 ♕c2 and 17 ♖fe1 becomes clear: Black's queenside counterplay has been stopped for good and the prospects of carrying out e4-e5 have become bright.

20...♕d7 21 e4 ♖de8 22 ♖ad1 ♕d8 23 ♘a4

White denies Black the possibility of 23...b6. Note also that while White's

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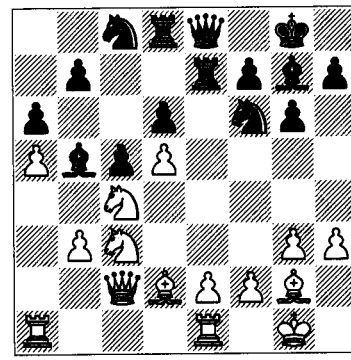


control of e5 could be diminished by ...♗xc4, the b7-pawn would then become exposed in all its backwardness.

23...♘d7 24 ♗c3

Exchanging off the dark-squared bishops, in itself a pleasure, here further weakens Black's grip on the critical e5-square.

24...♗xc3 25 ♕xc3 h5 26 f4 ♔h7 27 ♘ab2 f6 28 ♘d3

Meddling with the queenside pawn-structure, either by ...♗xc4, bxc4 b5 or by ...b6, just creates a weak a6-pawn. Black has therefore adopted a passive waiting posture, but White can still increase his power in the centre.

28...♖g7 29 ♔h2 ♗xc4 30 bxc4 ♘e7

Squeezed on his back ranks and aware of the coming e5, Black would like to meet it by ...♘f5, but he must pay the price established when b3 was played: the b7-pawn becomes another target.

31 ♖b1 ♕c7 32 h4

Before any decisive steps are taken, the bishop is given an active role on a new diagonal.

32...♘g8 33 ♗h3 ♖ge7 34 ♘f2

White defends the e4-pawn, but already has in mind a later e5 followed by ♘e4.

34...♘f8 35 ♖b6 ♘d7 36 ♗xd7 ♖xd7 37 e5

The lengthy preparations have finally led to the key breakthrough. The pawn-majority results in the desired thrust which definitely opens up the enemy camp for the entry of White's active pieces.

37...dxe5 38 fxe5 fxe5 39 ♘e4 ♔g7 40 ♘g5 ♘f6 41 ♘e6+ ♖xe6 42 ♖xe6 ♘g4+ 43 ♔g1 ♖f7 44 d6 ♕c6 45 ♖1xe5 ♘xe5 46 ♕xe5+ ♔h7 47 ♖e8 ♖g7 48 ♖e7 ♖xe7 49 ♕xe7+ ♔h6 50 d7 ♕c7 51 ♕g5+ 1-0

Black's downfall started the very moment when his queenside pawn-majority lost its mobility. It was precisely then that the active white majority on the other wing became the main factor in the struggle ahead. Once again we are confronted with the simple truth that only active, mobile pawn-majorities matter. There are hundreds of games in which a pawn surplus on one side of the board brings no advantage whatever, but, as we have seen, a small erroneous step can convert such formations into an advancing, deadly machine that nothing can stop. The selected games above give an unambiguous warning that the pawn-majority is a weapon one should never underrate.

Minority Attacks

Hand in hand with the pawn-majority goes the pawn-minority. Whenever the pawn-formation is broken in two, a frequent consequence is that there are two minorities on different sides, each confronting an enemy majority. It is like heads and tails on a coin, linked inseparably together. Like pawn-majorities, pawn-minorities occur with all types of centres but are most common with the dynamic centre. The reason is the same – the asymmetrical pawn-structure.

We have already studied plenty of examples with various types of pawn-minorities, and seen their appearance in the opening and the role they had in the middlegame. We have witnessed minority attacks in which a small unit of pawns, usually two of them, were launched against a larger pawn-structure in order to weaken it and open up files or diagonals for pieces to use. However, the term 'minority attack' may cause some confusion. For quite a long time, the term 'minority attack' has become almost synonymous in instructional books with the minority attack carried out by White in the Exchange Queen's Gambit. I have not been able to ascertain exactly when and why this happened. It is quite obvious that the term 'minority attack' has a far wider meaning; any advance of a smaller pawn unit against a larger pawn unit is a minority attack. We have seen numerous cases of minority attacks, especially in the Sicilian, where it forms a natural part of strategic plans. Therefore we shall not revisit scenarios that we have already encountered and in this chapter we shall stick to a short survey of the

Queen's Gambit minority attack, but I would like the reader to be aware that the nature of these cases does not differ from those we have already seen. Here, the centre is not the dynamic centre of the Sicilian Dragon or Scheveningen, for instance; it is the fixed centre characteristic of the Queen's Gambit and related systems, but much of it is common – the composition of the pawn unit, its targets and its aims. See for yourself!

Timman – Andersson
Tilburg 1987
Queen's Gambit

1 c4 e6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 d4 ♘f6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗g5 c6 6 e3 ♗e7 7 ♕c2

When entering the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit, White should always take care to control the b1-h7 diagonal, and his move-order is conditioned by that ambition. The queen move has several positive points: an early simplifying ...♘e4 is prevented, ...♗f5 is thwarted, and White's dominance of this diagonal will facilitate either a kingside attack or a queenside minority attack, depending on where White castles.

7...♘bd7 8 ♘f3 ♘f8

The beginning of a long manoeuvre which will take the knight via e6 and g7 to f5. At this delicate opening stage, it is dubious to invest so much time in a somewhat unnatural scheme. Sometimes this elaborate plan involves a different route – a6-c7-e6-g7-f5. In contrast the simple, logical 8...0-0 looks healthier.

9 ♗d3 ♘e6 10 ♗h4 g6 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♖ab1 ♘g7

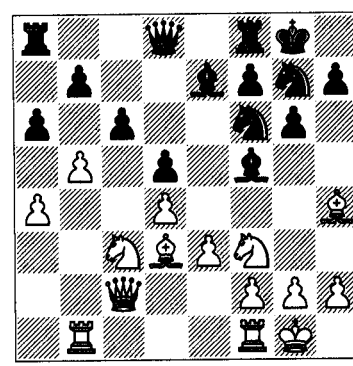
Both sides consistently carry out their strategic plans: Black prepares 13...♗f5 and desires simplifications, while White is ready to play b4. 12...a5 13 a3 would not change the course of events.

13 b4

The closed pawn-centre as a rule directs the play towards the wings. By advancing his b-pawn, White follows an old prescription: to reach the b5-square and exchange at c6, creating a backward pawn on the c-file, the potential target of his pressure.

13...a6 14 a4 ♗f5 15 b5 *(D)*

B



We see the minority attack in its pure form. As a result, White's more compact pawn-structure will be an asset, but for the time being the inevitable reduction of material helps Black to keep his problems under control.

15...♗xd3 16 ♕xd3 axb5 17 axb5 ♘f5

In my opinion 17...♘d7 was a better option in order to preserve two

knights. For example: 18 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 19 bxc6 bxc6 20 ♕c2 ♘f5 21 ♘a4 ♕d6 followed by 22...♘e7. The knights watch the sensitive dark squares with more care.

18 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 19 ♖fc1 ♖a3

By threatening 20...c5, Black tries to clarify the situation on the queenside. This is a better try than the passive 19...♖c8.

20 bxc6 bxc6 21 ♕c2 ♕a8 22 ♘e2 ♖a6 23 ♘f4 ♘d6

23...♘e7 comes into consideration, as does 23...♖b8; exchanging a pair of rooks would help the defence. However, Andersson opts for a more active defence.

24 ♘d2 ♗e7

Planning to counter 25 ♘d3 by 25...♘b5.

25 h3 ♖d8

Necessary in order to carry out 26...♘b5.

26 ♘d3 ♘b5 27 ♖b3 ♗d6?!

Seeking to exchange a pair of rooks by 27...♖a2 was again much better. Although the c6-pawn remains a lasting weakness, the defence would be alleviated.

28 ♘b4! ♗xb4 29 ♖xb4 ♖b8 30 ♕c5 ♖b7

Anticipating 31 ♘f3, Black prepares 31...f6.

31 ♘f3 f6 32 ♘e1 ♖ba7 33 ♘d3 ♖a1 34 ♖bb1

Of the two rooks, the one on b4 is more passive.

34...♖xb1 35 ♖xb1 ♔f7?

There is no time to exchange the other rook: 35...♖a1 36 ♖xa1 ♕xa1+ 37 ♔h2 ♕c3 (or 37...♕a8 38 ♕e7) 38 ♕xc3 ♘xc3 39 ♘b4 would be a high price. But 35...♖d7 36 ♘b4 ♘a7 37 ♖c1 ♔g7 came into consideration. The text-move should lose by force.

36 ♘b4 ♖a1 37 ♖xa1 ♕xa1+ 38 ♔h2 ♘c3

Black seeks a last chance in a sudden counterattack.

39 ♘xc6 ♘e2 40 ♕a7+

40 ♘d8+ does not work due to 40...♔g8.

40...♕xa7 41 ♘xa7 ♔e6 42 ♘c6 h5 43 g3 ♘c3 44 ♔g2 ♘e4 45 ♘b4 ♘d2 46 ♘d3 g5 47 f3 ♘c4 48 ♔f2 ♘d6 49 ♘c5+ ♔e7 50 ♔e2?

50 e4 is logical.

50...♘f5 51 g4?

White's play has become careless, and with these two mistakes he ruins his winning chances by allowing the exchange of too many pawns. 51 ♔f2 ♔d6 52 ♘b3 would keep his hopes alive.

51...hxg4 52 hxg4 ♘h6 53 e4 dxe4 54 ♘xe4 f5 55 ♘f2

After 55 gxf5 ♘xf5 56 ♔d3 ♔e6 White makes no progress either.

55...♔e6 56 ♔e3 ♘g8 57 ♔d3 fxg4 58 ♘xg4 ♔f5 59 d5 ♘e7 60 ♔c4 ♔f4 ½-½

Reshevsky – Geller

Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2 d5 5 cxd5 exd5 6 ♗g5 h6 7 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 8 a3 ♗xc3+ 9 ♕xc3 0-0 10 e3 c6

The initial phase has divided the pawn-structures in two, giving White

his minority on the queenside. No matter how small, it is the only advantage he can count with. The very fact that Black's king is protected by his pawn-minority permits us to predict that his pawn shield will not be used aggressively. The battle, therefore, will be waged on the queenside.

11 ♘e2 ♗f5

In order to prevent White's next move, Black could continue 11...♖e8 and after 12 ♘g3 restrict the knight by 12...g6. This is the reason why many players prefer 11 ♘f3 followed by 12 ♗e2.

12 ♘f4 ♘d7 13 ♗e2 ♖fe8 14 0-0 ♘f8

The knight is well posted on f4 and Black is impatient to remove it from there.

15 b4

The position is simple and dry; only by the minority attack can some initiative be squeezed out of it.

15...♘e6

Hoping for 16 ♘xe6 ♖xe6, when 17...♕g5 creates counterplay on the kingside, but White obviously does not need to go in for this.

16 ♘h5 ♕g6 17 ♘g3 ♖ac8 18 ♖ac1 *(D)*

Black was ready to meet 18 b5 with 18...c5.

18...♘g5?

Black is now ready to play 19...♘e4, with further simplification. At the same time the c8-rook is now defended and everything looks well. However, if he had looked at the position with more patience and less optimism, he would have noticed the coming blow and

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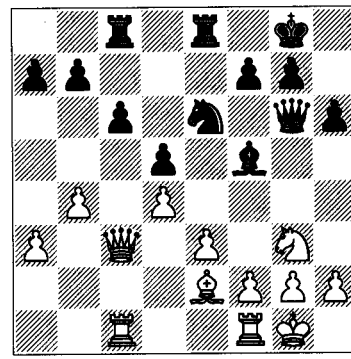

played 18...a6. Of course, White will be able to carry out a4 and b5 anyway, but that would mean further exchanges and so significantly alleviate the defence.

19 b5!

The slowness of a minority attack often seems to lull the defender into a false sense of security. We encounter typical errors and typical punishment again and again.

19...♘e4

The planned 19...cxb5 would fail to 20 ♕b3 ♗e6 21 ♗xb5, etc.

20 ♕a5

We realize now what the omission of ...a6 means. All of a sudden Black's situation has become critical.

20...c5!

One recognizes a strong player in a predicament. A pawn is gone, but chances are still alive.

21 ♘xf5

For instance: 21 ♕xa7 c4 or 21 dxc5 ♘xc5 22 ♕xa7 ♗c2.

21...♕xf5 22 dxc5 b6!

Again Geller at his best! Black is ready to allow his opponent two passed

pawns if he can have a chance too. His chance is his c-pawn.

23 ♕xa7 bxc5 24 ♗d3

Otherwise the queen would be exposed to harassment.

24...c4 25 ♗xe4 ♕xe4 26 ♖fd1 c3 27 ♕d4?!

Appearances can be deceptive. Although this looks the most natural of moves, it forfeits most of White's advantage. 27 ♖d4 is much better.

27...♖c4 28 ♕xd5 c2 29 ♖d2 ♕xd5 30 ♖xd5 ♖a8 31 b6 ♖b8?

After heroic defence Black misses a hidden point. 31...♖xa3! 32 b7 ♖b4 33 ♖d8+ ♔h7 34 b8♕ ♖xb8 35 ♖xb8 ♖d3 36 ♖f1 ♖c3 37 ♖bb1 cxb1♕ 38 ♖xb1 h5 leads to a theoretically drawn endgame.

32 ♖d6 ♖a4 33 ♖xc2 ♖xa3 34 h3 ♖b3 35 ♖cc6 ♖b2 36 e4 h5 37 e5 h4 38 ♖d4 ♖2xb6 39 ♖xb6 ♖xb6 40 ♖xh4 ♖b1+ 41 ♔h2 ♖e1 42 f4 ♖e3 43 ♖g4 ♔h7 44 ♖g3 ♖e2 45 h4 ♖e4 46 ♖f3 f6 47 exf6 gxf6 48 ♔g3 ♔g6 49 ♖a3 f5 50 ♖a6+ ♔h5 51 ♖f6?

This is the final error that throws away the fruit of White's hard work. 51 ♖a8 would still have won; for instance, 51...♖e3+ 52 ♔f2 ♖b3 53 g3 ♔g4 (in case of checks White will hide his king at h3, move the rook to g5, etc.) 54 ♖g8+ ♔h3 55 ♖g5, etc.

51...♖e3+ 52 ♔f2 ♖a3 53 g3

After 53 ♖xf5+ ♔xh4, 54 ♖g5 allows Black to draw by using stalemate ideas, while 54 ♖f8 ♔g4 gets White nowhere.

53...♖f3+ 54 ♔e2 ♖xg3 55 ♖xf5+ ♔xh4 56 ♔f2 ♖a3 57 ♖g5 ♖b3 58 ♖g1 ♔h5 59 ♔e2 ♖a3 60 f5 ♖a5 ½-½

The notorious theory that all the rook endgames are drawn has been vindicated, but the old warning that the minority attack should not be taken lightly has been corroborated once more.

Petrosian – Spassky

World Ch match (game 20), Moscow 1969

Queen's Gambit

1 c4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘f3 ♗e7 4 ♘c3 ♘f6 5 ♗g5 0-0 6 e3 h6 7 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 8 ♕d2

Having taken on f6, White will keep his central pawn-structure firm, limiting the potential activity of Black's dark-squared bishop.

8...b6 9 cxd5 exd5 10 b4

In this case the primary task of the white minority is to hinder ...c5. This preventive measure against Black's expansion on the queenside is wholly consistent with the exchange at f6.

10...♗b7?!

At b7 the light-squared bishop will fulfil its elementary role of defending the d5-pawn, but in passive, awkward circumstances. Posted at e6, it would do the same, but without the negative connotations that the further course of the game highlights.

11 ♖b1 c6

On b1 the rook takes care that no freeing ...c5 will be available to Black. In Korchnoi-Ciric, USSR-Yugoslavia 1966, Black tried to manage without 11...c6, but his 11...♘d7 12 b5 ♖e8 13 a4 ♘f8 left the d5-pawn isolated and 14 g3 ♘e6 15 ♗g2 started the long,

irresistible pressure on the central point.

12 ♗d3 ♘d7 13 0-0 ♖e8 14 ♖fc1 *(D)*

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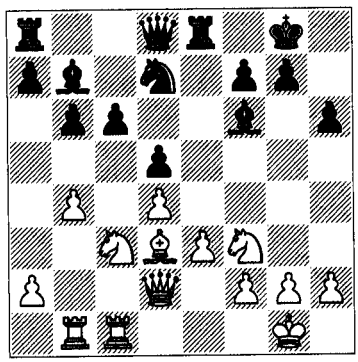


14...a5?!

A risky decision, hoping to provoke 15 b5, when 15...c5 would finally be possible. However, White continues consistently, keeping Black's expansion under control. As a consequence a backward pawn appears at b6.

15 bxa5 ♖xa5 16 ♗f5 ♖a6

Black's b6-pawn needs protection. 16...b5 would fail to 17 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 18 ♘xd5.

17 ♖b3 g6 18 ♗d3 ♖a7 19 ♖cb1

Cautious, continuous pressure. The hasty 19 e4 would ruin all the good work in view of 19...dxe4 20 ♘xe4 c5, when 21 ♘d6?! can be met successfully by 21...♗xf3 22 ♘xe8?! ♗g5 (Suetin).

19...♗g7 20 a4 ♕e7 21 ♗f1

In vacating the d3-square for the knight, White obviously has in mind g3 and ♗h3, again endangering the b6-pawn. Black reacts by exchanging light-squared bishops, but that weakens the c6-pawn.

21...♗a6 22 h4

A somewhat mysterious move at this point, criticized by a number of hasty commentators. The course of the game will reveal its strategic aims best.

22...♗xf1 23 ♖xf1 h5?!

An unforced error.

24 ♖e1 ♖aa8 25 g3 ♕d6 26 ♔g2 ♔f8 27 ♖eb1 ♔g8 28 ♕d1 ♗f8 29 ♖3b2 ♗g7 30 ♖c2 ♖a7 31 ♖bc1

With this typical series of waiting moves, Petrosian aims to gain time and camouflage his intentions, and so to catch his opponent unawares.

31...♘b8?!

Just when White has turned his pressure against the c6-pawn, Black plays a superficial move which facilitates White's plan.

32 ♘e2!

Since 32...♖xa4 could now be met by 33 ♖xc6 ♘xc6 34 ♕xa4, further weakening Black's pawn-structure, White has found the right moment to improve the position of his pieces. The queen will take over the defence of the a4-pawn, freeing the queen's knight for an efficient manoeuvre.

32...♖c7

If 32...♕b4, then 33 ♖b1.

33 ♕d3 ♖a7 34 ♕b3 ♖a6 35 ♘f4

Now it is easier to understand the far-seeing 22 h4.

35...♖d8 36 ♘d3

Threatening 37 ♘b4.

36...♗f8 37 ♘fe5 ♖c8 38 ♖c3

But not 38 ♘f4 due to 38...c5.

38...♗e7 39 ♘f4 ♗f6 40 ♘ed3

40 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 41 ♖xc6 also wins, but the text-move is highly characteristic of Petrosian's boa-constrictor procedures. 41 ♘xd5 is threatened and if Black moves his rook from c8, then 41 ♘b4 will win the other pawn. An unbearable embrace.

40...♖a5 41 ♕xb6 ♖xa4 42 ♖c5 ♖a6 43 ♖xd5!

This final blow hardly needs any explanation.

43...♕xf4 44 ♕xa6 ♕e4+ 45 f3 ♕e6 46 ♕c4 ♕xe3 47 ♘e5 ♖f8 48 ♖c5 ♗e7 49 ♖b1 ♗xc5 50 ♖xb8 1-0

The task given to the queenside minority unit was carried out masterfully, proving again that the defence against the minority advance on the queenside with a closed centre is not so easy. Its slow and apparently innocuous movement is deceptive and many a time catches us unprepared for its lasting pressure. It takes patience and precise thinking to stand one's ground. But a player of bold style and fertile imagination will seek a bolder, more dynamic response. Let us learn from Rashid Nezhmetdinov on a lucky day of his.

Taimanov – Nezhmetdinov
USSR Ch, Kiev 1954
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 c6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♘c3 ♘f6 6 ♗g5 ♗e7 7 ♕c2 ♘bd7 8 e3 0-0 9 ♗d3 ♖e8 10 0-0 ♘f8 11 ♖ab1

The simple straightforward plan is to advance the b-pawn to b5, exchange at c6 and create a backward pawn on the c-file, which is to be the target of middlegame pressure.

11...a5

This will not prevent the advance, but it will get rid of the potentially weak a-pawn.

12 a3 ♘e4

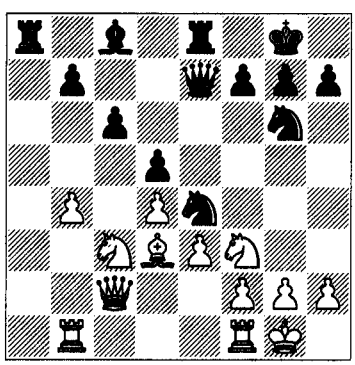
Black does not indulge in time-consuming manoeuvres such as Andersson did in the above game against Timman. He looks for simple, simplifying answers relieving his position of pressure as much as possible.

13 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 14 b4 axb4

14...♗f5 is also good, keeping White's mild initiative and small advantage within limits.

15 axb4 ♘g6 *(D)*

15...♗f5 is weaker due to 16 b5, when White carries out his initial strategy.



The text-move controls e5, but the idea behind it is deeper. A player of Nezhmetdinov's cast of mind does not accept a passive defensive role and seeks counterchances on the kingside.

16 b5?!

The brilliant but impatient mind of Mark Taimanov (as I remember him from personal experience) follows his plan notwithstanding enemy preparations on the kingside. The careful 16 ♖fc1 would respond better to the necessities of the position.

16...♗g4 17 ♘d2? ♘xd2 18 ♕xd2 ♘h4!

White could hardly have expected this bolt from the blue! Black threatens 19...♗h3, 19...♗f3 and even the brutal 19...♘f3+. White must pay the price for his impatience.

19 f3 ♕xe3+ 20 ♕xe3 ♖xe3 21 fxg4 ♖xd3 22 bxc6 bxc6

But not 22...♖xc3 because of 23 cxb7 ♖b8 24 ♖bc1.

23 ♘e2 ♖d2 24 ♖f2 h6 25 ♖bf1 ♘g6 26 h3 f6 27 ♘g3 ♖xd4 28 ♖b1 ♖a7 29 ♖b8+ ♔h7 30 ♖fb2 ♖d1+ 31 ♔h2 ♖e1 32 ♖d8 ♘f4 33 ♘h5 ♖e2 34 ♖xe2 ♘xe2 35 ♖c8 ♘d4 36 ♘f4 ♖e7 37 h4 ♖e4 38 ♔g3 ♖e3+ 39 ♔f2 ♖e4 40 g3 ♘e6 41 ♖xc6 ♘xf4 42 gxf4 ♖xf4+ 43 ♔g3 ♖e4 44 ♖d6 ♖e5 45 h5 ♔g8 46 ♔f4 g5+?

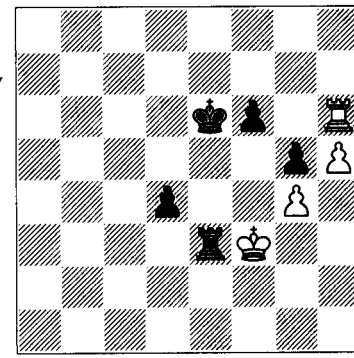
Nezhmetdinov's play oscillated from extraordinary heights to astonishing lows. 46...♔f7 47 ♖d7+ ♔e6 48 ♖xg7 d4 wins in simple fashion because the white king is cut off and cannot help.

47 ♔f3 ♔f7 48 ♖d7+ ♔e6 49 ♖h7 d4 50 ♖xh6

The difference, of course, lies in the passed rook's pawn.

50...♖e3+ *(D)*

White would parry 50...d3 by 51 ♖h8 ♖d5 52 ♖e8+ followed by ♖e1, when the passed d-pawn is under control.



51 ♔f2 ♖e4 52 ♔f3 ♖f4+ 53 ♔g3 d3 54 ♖h8 ♖d4 55 ♖e8+ ♔f7 56 ♖e1 d2 57 ♖d1 ♖d3+ 58 ♔g2 ♔g7 59 ♔f2 ♔h6 60 ♔g2 f5 61 gxf5 ♔xh5 62 ♔f2 g4?

Black could still have won by 62...♖d5! 63 ♔g3 ♔h6! (heading for f6); e.g., 64 ♔g4 ♖d3! 65 f6 ♔g6 66 f7 ♔xf7 67 ♔xg5 ♔e6 68 ♔f4 ♔d5, and White's king is shut out.

63 f6 g3+ 64 ♔e2 ♖d6 65 ♔f3 ½-½

Meeting the always unpleasant minority attack does not necessarily have to be a depressing job of passive defence. Nezhmetdinov turned it into an exciting counter-offensive. Unfortunately, Black is not given a chance to carry out a counterattack of this type so often. In most cases the reality he is forced to experience is the grinding task of passive opposition. The psychological burden of long hours of defence usually exceeds the difficulties on the board. It is an additional reason why the minority attack in the Queen's Gambit remains difficult to face despite many years of experience.

5 The Dynamic Centre

In sharp contrast with other types of centre, the dynamic pawn-centre is characterized by movable pawn units, and is capable of sudden changes. In comparison with the blocked or fixed centre, the dynamic centre is undefined. Movement is its inherent quality which can change its character in a move or two, transforming it into a fixed or blocked centre or dissolving it into open space.

The dynamic centre is characterized by some other properties too. It implies influence in the centre, not occupation of the central squares and, therefore, balanced concentration of forces bearing on the centre and usually some spatial advantage for one side or the other. But first and foremost, the dynamic pawn-centre implies an asymmetrical pawn-formation. All its traits begin there. Such a changeable pawn-structure means two things:

1) The balance in the centre is not the classical, positional balance, based on the occupied central squares or just the shared control of them, but a new, dynamic balance based on the constant threat of potential action.

2) The relations between the centre and the wing are much more complex, closer and more fluid. These relations are our main interest. We shall cover the state of the centre and wing actions.

When we studied the closed centre we were able to conclude that active play naturally takes place on the wings. The centre is secure and wing attacks depend primarily on their quality, their quickness and precision. As a rule, nothing in the closed centre can endanger the ongoing events on the wings. With the dynamic centre, things are essentially different. On one hand, the centre itself is subject to unexpected tactical blows. On the other hand, if the centre is assessed as relatively stable, wing attacks can be undertaken. When one side decides to play on a wing, it can be countered in three main ways: by play on the same wing, by counterplay on the other wing or by a counterblow in the centre. The links between these possibilities are subtle and a factor for both sides to consider constantly. It is a field that modern chess has been exploring for several decades now. Today it is of great practical interest, and one of the main issues of chess theory.

The Central Counterblow

First we shall examine the theory of the central counterblow, if for no other reason then because for a long time a simple theoretical recipe said that a wing attack should be answered by a

counterblow in the centre! It is probably one of the most widespread maxims we inherited from the early chess pioneers. It is difficult to determine the idea's precise origin, but games demonstrating an awareness of the concept go a long way back. We shall start our analysis with a game played at the beginning of the 20th century, in which White, then the world champion, starts an early, audacious pawn attack on the kingside, while his opponent, a talented though lesser-known player, tries to halt it by engaging his forces in the centre.

Em. Lasker – Napier
Cambridge Springs 1904
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♗g7 6 ♗e3 d6 7 h3

This apparently quiet move conceals aggressive intentions.

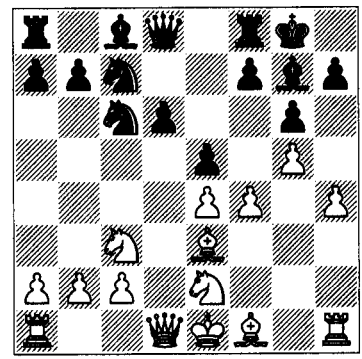
7...♘f6 8 g4 0-0 9 g5 ♘e8

A similar position, though from the Najdorf Sicilian (...a6 had been played instead of ...♘c6 while Black had not castled and the bishop was still on c1), arose in the game Fischer-Reshevsky, USA Ch, New York 1962/3; there Black met the pawn advance by ...♘h5. In our position he could choose 9...♘d7 10 h4 ♕a5, ready to meet 11 f4 by 11...♘xd4 12 ♗xd4 e5 13 fxe5 ♘xe5. The text-move seems somewhat slow, but it is a part of a logical plan.

10 h4 ♘c7 11 f4

With the king still on e1, White's early attack involves serious risks.

11...e5 12 ♘de2 *(D)*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12...d5

Napier follows the principle that one should respond to a kingside pawn attack with an energetic central counterblow. It justifies the manoeuvre ...♘e8-c7 and it does look good: many commentators supplied it with a '!' or at least '!?', so strong was the belief in the central counterblow. However, I remain sceptical. In comparison with the highly volatile situation resulting from it, 12...♗g4, proposed by Réti, looks very sound and convincing. Let us note in passing that 12...exf4 13 ♘xf4 ♘e5 14 ♗e2 is not so attractive for Black.

13 exd5 ♘d4 14 ♘xd4 ♘xd5

Shrewdly conceived: now 15 ♘xd5 would fail to 15...exd4 and it seems that the better developed black forces will prevail. But White has a trump-card up his sleeve...

15 ♘f5! ♘xc3 16 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 17 ♘e7+

This check is a colossal gain of time for a player carrying out an attack on a razor's edge. Instead, 17 ♘xg7 ♘d5 18 ♗d2 exf4 (generally given as winning

for Black) 19 c4 ♘e3 20 ♗a5 b6 21 ♗c3 ♘c2+ (if 21...♗b7, then 22 ♖h2) 22 ♔f2 ♗b7 23 ♗g2 f3! (if 23...♗xg2 24 ♔xg2 ♘xa1 25 ♖xa1 ♖ac8 there is 26 ♖e1) 24 ♗xf3 ♗xf3 25 ♔xf3 ♘xa1 26 ♖xa1 ♖d3+ 27 ♔e4 ♖xc3 28 bxc3 ♔xg7 would eventually lead to a draw.

17...♔h8

If 17...♔f8, then 18 ♘xc8 or 18 ♗c5.

18 h5!

18 ♘xc8 is not good any more due to 18...♘d5, while 18 bxc3 fails to 18...exf4, but the excellent text-move keeps a strong initiative.

18...♖e8

18...exf4 would be punished at once by 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 ♘xg6+ ♔g8 21 ♗c4+. 18...♘d5 is also unconvincing in view of 19 ♘xd5 ♖xd5 20 ♗c4 ♗e6 21 h6, etc.

19 ♗c5 gxh5

After 19...exf4, 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 ♗c4 has been claimed to be very good for White, but 21...b6! holds on (22 ♗f7? ♗b7 or 22 ♔f1 ♗f5 23 ♘xf5 gxf5).

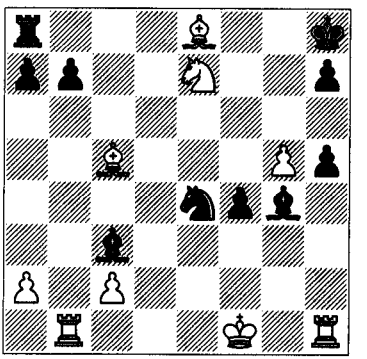
20 ♗c4?

Simple and expected, since 20 bxc3 ♗f8 21 ♗b5 wins the exchange but is neither clear nor consistent. However, this was nevertheless preferable.

20...exf4?

An audacious idea, but with a hole in it. 20...♗e6 21 ♗xe6 fxe6 22 bxc3 ♗f8 23 ♖xh5 ♗xe7 24 ♗xe7 ♖xe7 25 fxe5 ♖g8 is passive but certainly better. 20...♗f8 21 ♗xf7 ♗xe7 22 ♗xe8 ♗xc5 23 bxc3 exf4 also came into consideration. Best of all though, as Nunn pointed out, is 20...♘e4! 21 ♗xf7 ♗g4!, which is very good for Black.

21 ♗xf7 ♘e4 22 ♗xe8 ♗xb2 23 ♖b1 ♗c3+ 24 ♔f1 ♗g4 *(D)*



W

A memorable position. Black is a whole rook down, but he threatens many things: to retake the piece on c5 or e8 or one of the rooks.

25 ♗xh5!

The stronger the player, the simpler his solutions. White forcefully simplifies into a won endgame.

25...♗xh5 26 ♖xh5 ♘g3+ 27 ♔g2 ♘xh5 28 ♖xb7

White has transformed his material advantage into a positional superiority. His pieces are ideally posted in comparison to the black forces, which have lost their coordination.

28...a5 29 ♖b3

Back to the other wing.

29...♗g7 30 ♖h3 ♘g3 31 ♔f3

The pawn falls and Black's knight loses its foothold.

31...♖a6 32 ♔xf4 ♘e2+ 33 ♔f5 ♘c3 34 a3 ♘a4 35 ♗e3 1-0

There cannot be any doubt that in this tense game both players understood the hidden relations between the

centre and the wings. Napier's counterblow in the centre did not yield fruit owing to White's superior understanding and tactical prowess, but he had a very clear idea how to meet a pawn attack on the wing and his play was based on it from the early moves. Some 20-30 years later it was common knowledge. We shall see that as years passed by, the chess master's faith in the magic prescription of the central counterblow weakened, but all through the second half of the 20th century we find illustrative games confirming its frequent validity. We shall choose among dozens of games, played in positions featuring modern dynamic pawn-structures.

Tseshkovsky – Kasparov
USSR Ch, Frunze 1981
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 g3 ♘f6 7 ♗g2

White's fianchetto has two main motivations: to prevent counterplay in the centre and to hinder any early queenside action by Black.

7...♗d7 8 0-0 ♗e7 9 a4

Played in order to limit Black's activity on the queenside. An alternative is 9 ♗e3 0-0 10 f4 a6 11 ♘b3 ♖c8 12 a4 ♘a5 with good play for Black.

9...0-0 10 ♘ce2

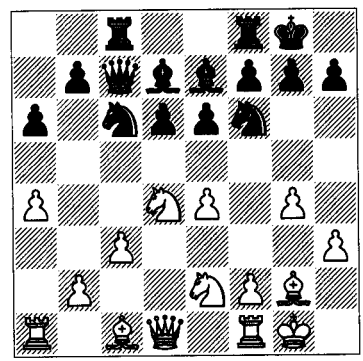
In order to avoid simplifications White usually retreats from the centre. 10 ♘b3 is an alternative; then Popović-Cebalo, Vinkovci 1982 continued 10...a6 11 a5 ♘e5 12 ♕e2 ♕c7 13 f4 ♘c4 14 ♔h1 d5! 15 exd5 ♖fe8 16 dxe6 ♗xe6 and Black seized the initiative. However, 10 ♘db5 comes more into consideration. Then 10...♕b8 11 ♗e3 a6 12 ♘a3 favours White, so perhaps 9...a6 would have been more precise.

10...♖c8 11 c3

11 b3 could be answered by 11...d5.

11...a6 12 h3 ♕c7 13 g4 *(D)*

B



Having prevented Black's counterplay on the queenside, White is ready to attack on the kingside, which is part of the general strategic plan implied by White's fianchetto.

Now Black is threatened with being pushed into passive defence by 14 g5, but he is a step ahead, and imposes a different course of events.

13...d5!

The theoretical maxim is put into practice: the wing attack is met by counter-action in the centre.

14 exd5 ♘xd5 15 ♗xd5?

Having been denied his favoured plan, White lacks a good substitute and decides to grab a pawn. However, the price he pays is high: by giving up his light-squared bishop, he further

exposes his already weakened kingside.

15...exd5 16 ♘f4 ♗c5 17 ♘b3 ♗a7 18 ♕xd5

The alternative capture 18 ♘xd5 obviously loses to 18...♕g3+ and 18 ♗e3 helps little because of 18...♗b8, threatening 19...g5.

18...♗e6! 19 ♘xe6 fxe6 20 ♕e4

20 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 21 ♗e3 again runs into 21...♗b8, while 20 ♕g2 ♘e5 is too painful to consider. Unfortunately for White, the concentrated pressure on the dark-square diagonals and the f-file brings about the fatal blow...

20...♖xf2! 21 ♖xf2 ♕g3+ 22 ♕g2 ♗xf2+ 23 ♔f1

If 23 ♔h1 then 23...♕d3 24 ♗f4 ♖f8.

23...♕e5 24 ♗f4 ♕xf4 25 ♕xf2 ♕c4+ 0-1

Black's counterblow in the centre was timely. The pawn sacrifice yielded excellent compensation in view of the perilously exposed white king.

Anand – Salov

Moscow 1992

Sicilian Defence

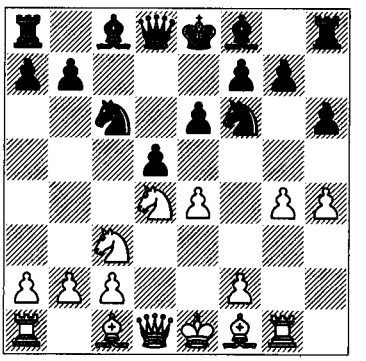
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 g4

This old recipe of Panov's against the Scheveningen Variation, later popularized by and named after Paul Keres, is based on a simple plan. On f6, the black knight has considerable influence in the centre; White wishes to chase it away and to seize space on the kingside.

6...h6

By stopping g5 for a while, this modest move also has a bearing on the centre.

7 h4 ♘c6 8 ♖g1 d5! *(D)*



Black strikes back before the intended g5 advance can be carried out. It is the proper time to do it for an additional reason: White's king is still on e1 and it will take several tempi to evacuate it to the security of the queenside.

9 ♗b5

9 exd5 ♘xd5 10 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 11 ♗g2 ♕a5+ 12 ♗d2 ♕e5+ 13 ♗e3 was played in a number of games. Instead of 13...♗d7 14 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 15 ♗xc6+ bxc6 16 ♕d4, leading to a better endgame for White, Kasparov's proposal should be heeded: 13...♘b4 14 c4 (to stop 14...♘d5) 14...♗c5 15 ♔f1 0-0 with level chances.

9...♗d7 10 exd5 ♘xd5 11 ♘xd5 exd5 12 ♗e3

This is Karpov's move, which he used against Spassky at Tilburg 1980. The king cannot remain on e1 forever and it is time to think of its future. 12

♕e2+ ♗e7 satisfies Black after 13 ♘f5 (or 13 ♗e3 0-0) 13...♗xf5 14 gxf5 ♔f8 followed by 15...♕a5 or 15...♗f6, depending on the circumstances, since Black's king will feel more secure than White's.

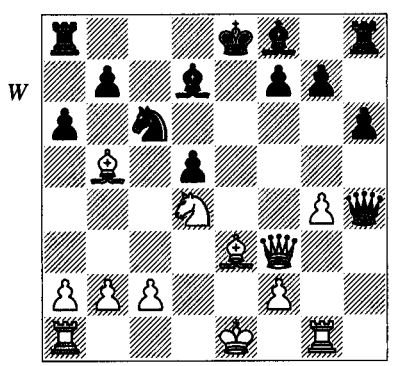
12...♕xh4

In the aforementioned game Karpov-Spassky Black grabbed the pawn by 12...♗e7 13 ♕d2 ♗xh4, but 14 0-0-0 ♗f6 15 ♘f5 ♗xf5 16 gxf5 led him into serious difficulties. Salov decides to take it now, and his decision is correct.

13 ♕f3

In case of 13 ♕e2 Black can simplify by 13...♘xd4 14 ♗xd4+ ♕e7 15 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7 16 ♗e3 (or 16 ♕xe7+ ♗xe7 17 ♗xg7 ♖he8) 16...♖d8 17 0-0-0 ♔c8 (Kasparov).

13...a6 *(D)*



14 ♗xc6

Maintaining the tension by 14 ♗a4 does not yield much after 14...♕f6, offering simplifications.

14...bxc6 15 0-0-0 ♗d6 16 ♘f5 ♗xf5 17 gxf5

This does look unpleasant because Black cannot castle, but there is a way out of the predicament...

17...♗e5!

From here the bishop both protects the g-pawn, a vital part of the black king's defensive shield, and takes up a dominant central position from where it can exert counter-pressure. At the same time Black gains a moment of relief because 18 ♗c5 would now allow the exchange of queens.

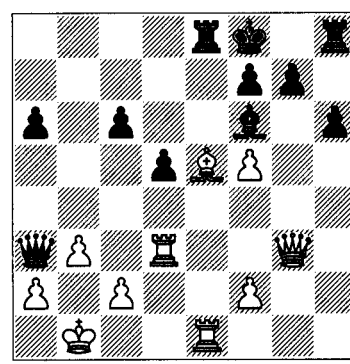
18 ♔b1 ♖b8 19 b3

Or 19 ♗c1 0-0.

19...♕b4 20 ♖d3 ♔f8

Given that he has a passed pawn on the h-file, Black can afford not to castle.

21 ♗d2 ♕d6 22 ♖e1 ♗f6 23 ♗f4 ♕a3 24 ♗e5 ♖e8 25 ♕g3 *(D)*



White now threatens ♗d6+ as well as f4, which would paralyse Black. However, Black now crowns his fine tactical play by finding a nice solution based on White's weak dark squares.

25...♖xe5! 26 ♖xe5 ♔g8 27 ♖e8+ ♔h7 28 ♖xh8+ ♔xh8 29 c3 ♕e7

The white king remains exposed and the f5-pawn shaky – two little facts that secure the balance.

30 ♕e3 ♕d7 31 ♕f3 ♔h7 32 ♔c2 a5 33 ♔d1 ♕e7 34 ♕e2 ♕d7 35 ♕f3 ♕e7 36 ♕e2 ♕d7 ½-½

No matter how risky it seemed, Salov's 8...d5 had a beneficial effect on his position. At the very moment when the pawn advance on the kingside threatened to push him back, the central thrust freed Black's game.

Daniilidis – Adorjan

Olympiad, Thessaloniki 1988
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 g5

We have seen that preparing g5 by ♖g1 and h4 costs time and enables Black to react in the centre at the proper moment. The text-move accelerates White's development, and in particular gives him time to castle queenside.

7...hxg5 8 ♗xg5

The pin on the f6-knight limits Black's possibilities in the centre.

8...♘c6

A natural reaction. Since the opening of the g-file makes it unpleasant for Black to castle kingside, his king must seek a secure refuge on the queenside.

9 ♕d2 ♕b6

This move, forcing the knight to retreat from the centre, has been the most popular response for a long time now.

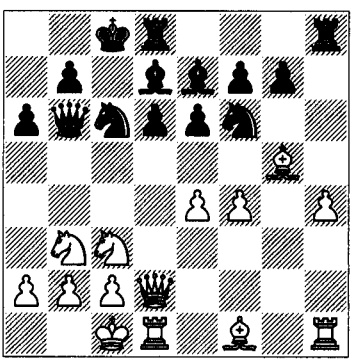
10 ♘b3

In case of 10 0-0-0, the exchange at d4 would lead to level play, while 10 ♘db5 a6 11 ♗e3 ♕d8 12 ♘d4 ♘g4 favours Black.

10...a6 11 0-0-0 ♗d7 12 h4

White's alternative is 12 ♗e3 ♕c7 13 f4. The bishop stands as well on its new diagonal as it did on g5, but the opinion prevailed for a long time that White should seize as much space on the kingside as possible.

12...♗e7 13 f4 0-0-0 *(D)*



14 ♗e2

The generally accepted idea was to transfer the light-squared bishop to f3, play h5, and then put pressure on the backward pawn at g7. The other plan is to carry out f5, exchange at e6 and then play against the potential weaknesses at e6 and g7. In the position after 14 ♗g2 ♕c7 15 f5 ♔b8 16 fxe6 fxe6 17 ♘e2 ♗c8 18 ♘f4 it seems that Black's position is becoming vulnerable, but in Liberzon-Andersson, Hastings 1979/80, Black struck back by 18...d5 19 exd5 exd5, when 20 ♘g6 was met calmly by 20...♗b4 21 c3

♖he8. The central thrust came at the proper time.

14...d5!

A well-conceived central breakthrough. Adorjan correctly concludes that he can immediately strike in the centre given that on e2 the bishop has no bearing on the centre.

15 exd5

Black's idea is based on the continuation 15 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 16 exd5 ♘b4, threatening simply to recapture the pawn by 17...♗c6 with fine play. Then 17 a3 ♘xd5 18 ♘xd5 exd5 19 ♕xd5 ♗c6 20 ♕f5+ ♔b8 is hardly attractive for White. 15 e5 ♘e4 is even less pleasant.

15...♘xd5 16 ♘xd5 exd5

White must now deal with the threat of 17...f6.

17 ♗xe7

White hopes for material gains, but whatever he does, it has become clear that Black's forces have broken free. Especially important is the activation of the light-squared bishop on d7.

17...♘xe7 18 ♕c3+

18 ♘d4 ♘f5 leads to level play.

18...♕c7 19 ♕xc7+

White must have been disappointed to find out that the planned 19 ♕xg7 ♘f5 20 ♕xf7 is well met by 20...♖df8. He therefore chose a level endgame.

19...♔xc7 20 h5

Preventing ...♘g6, but it is too late for any meaningful pressure on the g7-pawn.

20...♗f5 21 ♘d4 ♗e4 22 ♖hg1 g6 23 hxg6 ♘xg6 24 ♖g4 ♖h2 25 ♗d3 ♖e8 26 ♖e1 ♖f2 27 ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 28 ♗xf1 ♖h8 29 ♔d2 ♖h2+ 30 ♗e2 ♔d6

Black has succeeded in moving his pieces into more active positions. White's situation requires caution, but he continues light-heartedly...

31 b4?! ♘h4 32 ♔c3 ♘f5 33 ♘xf5+ ♗xf5 34 ♖g5 ♗xc2 35 ♗f3 ♗e4 36 ♗xe4 dxe4 37 ♖e5?

Correct was 37 ♖f5 ♖xa2 38 ♖xf7 e3 39 ♖f5, when the passed pawn represents no danger. After the text-move White will not only be a pawn down, but he will also have his king cut off, his rook passively posted and both pawns endangered.

37...♖xa2 38 ♖xe4 ♖a3+ 39 ♔b2 ♖f3 40 ♖d4+ ♔c6 41 ♔c2 b6 42 ♔d2 f5 43 ♔e2 ♖b3 44 ♔d2 ♔b5 45 ♖d5+ ♔xb4 46 ♖xf5 a5 47 ♖f8 a4 48 f5 a3 49 f6 ♖f3 50 ♔e2 ♖f5 51 f7 a2 52 ♖a8 ♔b3 0-1

One should be always on the alert in positions with the 'small centre' (black pawns on d6 and e6). They remind me of a spring cramped on the sixth rank but ready to recoil at any moment. When it happens, the position as a rule offers rich tactical possibilities. In this game Adorjan energetically seized his chance.

Lalić – Yermolinsky

World Team Ch, Lucerne 1997

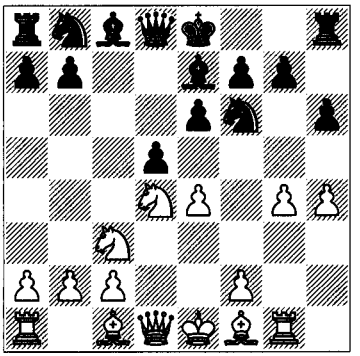
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 g4 h6 7 h4 ♗e7 8 ♖g1 d5 *(D)*

Black opposes White's pawn advance on the kingside with an energetic reaction in the centre.

9 exd5

W



After 9 ♗b5+ ♔f8 Black will be unable to castle, but the bishop is of little use on b5, while the pressure on White's pawn-centre is still there.

9...♘xd5 10 ♘xd5 exd5?!

This move opens a line for the light-squared bishop, but also opens the e-file to White's advantage and weakens Black's pawn-structure.

In Ljubojević-Timman, KRO match (game 4), Hilversum 1987, 10...♕xd5 11 ♗e3 ♘c6 12 g5 hxg5 13 hxg5 ♗d7 followed by ...0-0-0 gave White little.

11 g5 hxg5 12 hxg5 ♗c5 13 ♗e3 ♕b6 14 g6!

This is much more dangerous for Black than 14 ♕e2, which is met by the simple 14...♔f8 15 0-0-0 ♘c6, when the king is safe at f8 and the counter-pressure at d4 strong.

14...♘c6

It is important that 14...♕xb2 does not work due to 15 gxf7+ ♔xf7 (or 15...♔f8 16 ♘e6+) 16 ♕f3+ ♔e8 17 ♖xg7 ♕xa1+ 18 ♔e2 and Black cannot parry the threats to his naked king. 14...fxg6 15 ♕d3 is not appealing either.

15 ♗b5

Lalić considered 15 ♕f3 fxg6 and 15 gxf7+ ♔f8 and found both continuations unsatisfactory. The pin, however, causes serious problems.

15...fxg6

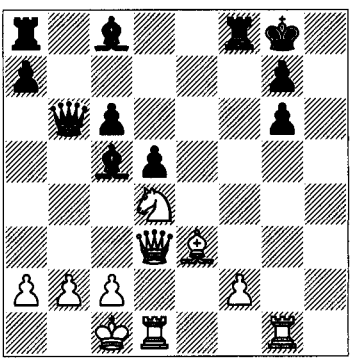
The developing 15...♗d7 is well met by 16 gxf7+ ♔f8 17 ♗xc6 bxc6 18 ♕d3! with a large advantage.

16 ♗xc6+

For a while Lalić toyed with the idea of continuing 16 ♕d3 0-0 17 ♕xg6 ♗xd4 18 ♗d3, threatening 19 ♖h1 and 20 ♖h8+, but 18...♕xb2 deterred him from doing so.

16...bxc6 17 ♕d3 0-0 18 0-0-0 *(D)*

B



18...♗f5? ½-½

Black has just committed a losing error, but offered a saving draw. It is interesting that Lalić felt there was a win in the position and spent some 25 minutes but, finding nothing, agreed to a draw. In the Croatian team we could not believe it, but analysing in our heads during the game we could not find the win either. After the game, however, when the position was put on

the board and proper analysis started, the winning procedure was discovered quickly: 19 ♘xf5 gxf5 (19...♖xf5 fails to 20 ♖xg6) and now White plays 20 ♖xg7+! ♔xg7 21 ♕c3+ d4 22 ♗xd4+! ♗xd4 23 ♖xd4, when the threats cannot be parried: 23...♖f6 24 ♖d7+ ♔g6 25 ♕g3+, etc.; 23...♔f7 24 ♖d6!, etc.; or 23...♕xd4 24 ♕xd4+ ♖f6 25 ♕d7+ ♔g6 26 ♕b7 and the queenside pawns will eventually decide. However, Lalić spent too much time calculating 20 ♗h6 ♖f7 21 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 22 ♖xg7+ (or 22 ♕xf5 ♗d4) 22...♔xg7 23 ♕g3+ ♔f6 24 ♖g1 ♗f8 and finding no win where there ought to be one, he became nervous and calculated only 20 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 21 ♕c3+ d4 22 ♖xd4 ♔g8, missing the correct line.

Having solved the mystery, it was easier to detect Black's error. If he includes 18...♖b8 19 b3 and only then continues 19...♗f5, 20 ♘xf5 gxf5 21 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 22 ♕c3+ d4 23 ♗xd4+ ♗xd4 24 ♖xd4 can be met by 24...♔f7 25 ♖d6 ♖b7, defending the king.

When a central counterblow occurs, a critical moment normally arises. Small nuances can change the nature of the position and the complications require a high level of precision from the players.

Anand – Ljubojević
Sicilian theme tournament, Buenos Aires 1994
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 f3

This continuation's popularity began to grow in the 1980s. Given that Black is likely to place his bishop on b7, White reinforces his e4-pawn, limiting the bishop's activity, rather than playing f4, which exposes the e4-pawn to pressure. At the same time White will prepare to castle queenside and is ready to carry out a pawn-storm on the kingside.

7...b5

Black seizes space on the queenside and prepares further steps on this wing.

8 g4 h6

This move slows down White's kingside advance.

9 ♕d2 ♘bd7 10 0-0-0 ♗b7

Black has developed his pieces flexibly: his central pawns on their third rank control the important central squares, while the well-positioned knight-pair and the b7-bishop complete the scene of harmonious activity.

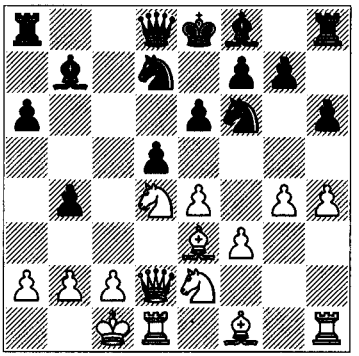
11 h4

This move looks like a natural continuation of the idea started with 8 g4. The alternative is 11 ♗d3, but after 11...♘e5 12 ♔b1 b4 13 ♘ce2 Black carried out his counter-action in the centre at once by 13...d5 in Hjartarson-Polugaevsky, Reykjavik 1987. After 14 exd5 ♘xd5 15 ♗f2 ♗e7 16 h4 ♕d7 he prepared to castle queenside and obtained good play.

11...b4 12 ♘ce2 d5 *(D)*

A move before White is ready to play g5, Black strikes back in the centre. His king is still in the centre and the prospects of castling quite unclear, but for the time being the king is well

W



protected where it is and, besides, the threat of g5 must be met radically.

13 ♗h3

In 1988 I watched with great interest the game Adams-Comas, played in the World junior championship in Adelaide, in which White very naturally reacted 13 exd5 ♘xd5 14 ♘f4, trying to open routes towards Black's king. Black defended cold-bloodedly by 14...♕a5 15 ♔b1 ♘xe3 16 ♕xe3 ♕e5, which later analysis proved good, and so White started to look for an alternative. The text-move attracted attention, because by closing the h-file it again threatens g5, when the bishop will be pointing in the right direction.

13...dxe4 14 g5 hxg5

14...exf3 15 gxf6 fxe2 16 ♕xe2 ♕xf6 (there is no time for 16...♗xh1 because of the devastating reply 17 ♘xe6) 17 ♖hf1 ♕e5 seems good at first glance, but 18 ♖xf7! forced the king into the open with brutal consequences in the game Zeziulkin-Jasnikowski, Polish Team Ch, Lubniewice 1994.

15 hxg5 exf3 16 ♘f4?!

This appears to be in keeping with the basic intention of opening the position and attacking, but the further course of the game points out that 16 ♘g3, controlling e4, is more appropriate.

16...♘e4 17 ♕e1 ♖xh3!

The breakthrough in the centre has resulted in the heightened activity of all pieces. At the moment the black king continues to be protected, but the sacrifice at e6 hangs in the air. Black's exchange sacrifice dilutes the threat and seizes the initiative.

18 ♘xh3 e5 19 ♘b3

19 ♘xf3 would allow 19...♕a5 20 ♔b1 ♘c3+.

19...a5 20 ♘d2 ♕c7 21 ♗b6 ♘xb6 22 ♘xe4 ♖c8 23 ♖h2 ♕c6

This move temporarily prevents the blockade to be constructed with knights on f2 and e4 and makes the f3-pawn feel better. 23...♕c4 obviously does not work due to 24 ♘d6+, etc.

24 ♘g3 ♕e6 25 ♔b1 ♘c4 26 ♘f2 ♘xb2?

Having obtained the superior position, Black thought it was time to finish the job.

27 ♖c1?

White errs in reply, presumably taking it for granted that 27 ♔xb2 ♖xc2+ 28 ♔xc2 ♕xa2+ is decisive. However, 29 ♔c1 ♕a1+ 30 ♔c2 b3+ 31 ♔xb3 brings about a curious situation in which, as you can ascertain, there is no win (31...♗d5+ is met by 32 ♖xd5 ♕xe1 33 ♘fe4). Never believe your opponent!

27...♘a4 28 ♘fe4 ♖c4 29 ♔a1 ♕g4 30 ♕f1 ♘b6

In case of 30...♖xe4? 31 ♘xe4 ♕xe4 32 ♕b5+ ♗c6 33 ♕b8+ ♔e7 34 ♖d1 Black would have made a mess of it.

31 ♘d2 ♖c5

31...♕xg3 32 ♘xc4 ♕xh2 33 ♘xb6 ♕e2, as pointed out by Ljubojević, was good enough. Unfortunately, time-trouble starts to creep into the happenings on the board in its usual sinister way...

32 ♕f2 ♘c4? 33 ♖h8 ♖c8 34 ♖e1 ♘xd2?

Short of time, Black finds a way to ruin his beautiful position by several obvious blunders.

35 ♖xe5+ ♔d7 36 ♕xd2+ ♔c7 37 ♖xf8 ♖xf8 38 ♖e7+ ♔c6

Or 38...♔b8 39 ♕d6+ ♔a8 40 ♖e5, etc.

39 ♘e4 1-0

This time the reaction in the centre was prepared by an early advance on the queenside. It was a necessary pre-condition, which characterizes the following game as well.

Anand – Kasparov

Linares 1999

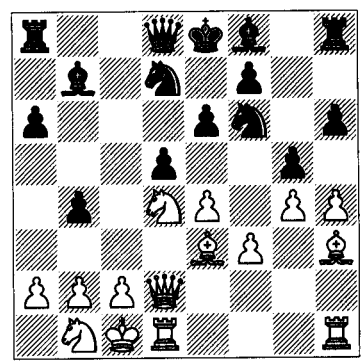
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 f3 e6 7 ♗e3 b5 8 g4 h6 9 ♕d2 ♘bd7 10 0-0-0 ♗b7 11 h4 b4 12 ♘b1

At first glance this retreat may look bizarre, but if you note that after 12 ♘a4 the knight is somewhat vulnerable and 12 ♘ce2, as we saw in the above game, also has its drawbacks in view of the central breakthrough, then this move, which keeps a bodyguard near the white king, clearly has its logic. Of course, the fact that the knight is excluded from the following skirmishes must have a bearing on the further course of the game.

12...d5 13 ♗h3 g5! *(D)*

In comparison with the 12 ♘ce2 line, this time 13...dxe4 14 g5 hurts Black much more because the knight is not exposed to attack after ...exf3. To justify his previous move, Black takes strong measures, sacrificing a pawn. This energetic move puts an end to White's pawn advance, but at a price.



14 hxg5 hxg5 15 exd5 ♘xd5 16 ♗xg5 ♕b6

Earlier in the same tournament Leko-Topalov continued 16...♕a5 but we shall see that game in another section (page 198). The text-move has to do with the feeling that the e6-pawn, the critical point of Black's defence, is vulnerable.

Instead 16...♕xg5 17 ♕xg5 ♗h6 18 ♕xh6 ♖xh6 finally opens the way for the b1-knight to return to the

battlefield. 19 ♘d2 ♘f4 is hardly appealing for White, but 19 g5 ♖g6 20 ♘d2 ♘f4 21 ♗f1 is advantageous.

17 ♗g2 ♖xh1 18 ♗xh1

If 18 ♖xh1 then 18...♗g7 wins a tempo – another small difference in comparison with the queen being on a5.

18...♖c8

Threatening 19...♘c3.

19 ♖e1

The king needed some breathing space. Besides, the move is in harmony with the intended advance f4-f5, which would expose the black king to attack.

19...♕a5!

If some day it turns out that this is not such a good move as it looks to me, it still deserves the exclamation mark for sheer courage. That 20 a3 ♕b6 would not now be so appealing for White is rather obvious, but the idea of going for the a2-pawn in face of the imminent danger to his own king is impressive. It is true that Black lacks a serious alternative. 19...♖c4, for instance, would be punished by 20 ♘xe6 fxe6 21 ♕d3.

20 f4 ♕xa2 21 f5 ♘c5 22 fxe6 ♗g7

The question is why not 22...fxe6. The e6-pawn cannot be taken (23 ♘xe6 ♘b3+), but after 23 ♕h2 the black king feels exposed.

23 exf7+ ♔xf7 24 ♗xd5+?

White's continuing problem is how to reactivate the b1-knight. The exchange at d5 will enable it to enter the scene, but at a high cost. In the meantime Black controls all the possible penetration squares in his camp, but White could take a longer route: 24 ♕f2+ ♔g8 25 ♕f5. On 25...♕c4 there is 26 ♗e4, while 25...♗xd4 26 ♕g6+ leads to a draw by repetition.

24...♕xd5 25 ♖e7+ ♔g8 26 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 27 ♘c3!

In order to threaten ♘f5+, White must obviously cover the c-file and this subtle move brings into play his last reserves. Unfortunately for him, it proves inadequate.

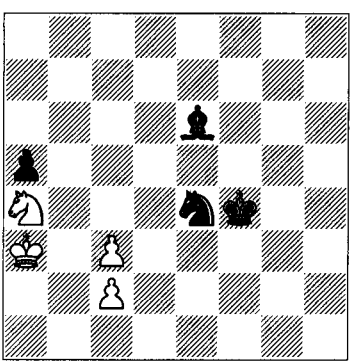
27...bxc3 28 ♘f5+ ♔f7 29 ♕xd5+

Obviously, 29 ♕xc3?? would lose to 29...♘b3+. So White loses a piece, but the reduced material still keeps hopes alive.

29...♗xd5 30 ♘d6+ ♔g6 31 ♘xc8 ♔xg5 32 ♘b6 ♗e6 33 bxc3 ♔xg4 34 ♔b2 ♔f4 35 ♔a3 a5 36 ♘a4 ♘e4? *(D)*

The course of the game demonstrates that Black should keep White's king further from his pawn by posting the knight at b6. So 36...♘d7 37 ♘b2 ♘b6 and now 38 ♘a4 ♘c4+ or 38 c4 ♗xc4 39 ♘a4 ♘d7 40 ♘c3 ♘e5 41 ♔a4 ♘c6 and there is no way to challenge the c6-knight.

W



37 ♘b2 ♘xc3 38 ♘d3+ ♔e3 39 ♘c5 ♗f5

39...♗d5 fails to 40 ♘b3, etc.

40 ♔b2 ♘d5 41 ♘b7 a4 42 c4 ♘b6 43 ♘d6 ♗d3 44 c5 ♘d5 45 ♔a3 ♗c2

Black could also try 45...♔d4 46 ♔xa4 ♔xc5 trying to trap the knight, but this is insufficient to win if White defends accurately.

46 ♘b5

In case of 46 ♘c4+ ♔d4 47 ♘b2 ♔xc5 48 ♘xa4+ ♔c4 49 ♘b2+ ♔b5 50 ♔a2 ♔b4 51 ♔a1 ♘c3 the knight is lost.

46...♘e7 47 ♘a7?

Strange things happen after a tense and difficult struggle. 47 ♘c3 eliminates the a4-pawn and draws. The text-move apparently draws as well, but there is a hole in what Anand saw.

47...♔d4 48 c6 ♘d5 49 ♘b5+ ♔c5 50 c7 ♗f5! 0-1

51 ♘a7 loses to 51...♘xc7 52 ♔xa4 ♔b6, while 51 ♔xa4 ♘b6+ 52 ♔a5 ♘c4+ 53 ♔a6 ♗c8+ also fails.

Withdrawing the knight to b1 had a lasting effect on the course of the game. The forces set free by the counterblow in the centre kept the dynamic balance impressively.

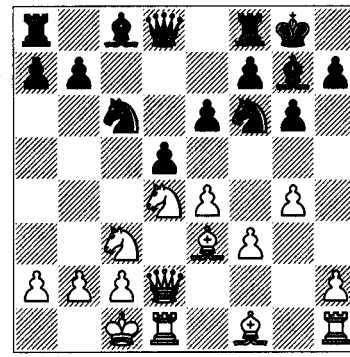
Zapata – J. Armas

Havana 1986

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗e3 g6 7 ♕d2 ♗g7 8 f3 0-0 9 g4 e6 10 0-0-0 d5 *(D)*

This is a simple reaction to what was once considered a premature pawn advance on the wing.



Black is able to respond in the centre owing to little tactical operations such as 11 g5 ♘h5 12 exd5 ♘xd4 13 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 14 ♕xd4 ♕xg5+, etc. The feeble 11 exd5 ♘xd5 also satisfies Black fully. However, Zapata succeeds in finding a new approach to the old theme.

11 g5 ♘h5 12 f4!?

This useful move causes difficulties for Black. White threatens 13 e5 and provokes the game reaction.

12...e5

Ceding in the centre by 12...dxe4 leads to a passive endgame after 13 ♘xc6 ♕xd2+ 14 ♖xd2 bxc6 15 ♘xe4. 12...♘xd4 13 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 14 ♕xd4 ♘xf4 fails to 15 ♕e5 ♘h5 16 exd5 exd5? 17 ♘xd5.

13 fxe5 dxe4

Otherwise White would play 14 ♘xd5, establishing a powerful knight in the centre.

14 ♘xc6 ♕xd2+ 15 ♖xd2 bxc6 16 ♘xe4

16 ♗g2 is stronger: 16...♗xe5 17 ♗xe4 or 16...♗f5 17 ♘xe4.

16...♗xe5 17 ♗c4 ♖e8?

When the bishop occupied c4, the point f7 obviously became vulnerable, so moving its defender is inadvisable. 17...a5 comes into consideration, as does 17...♗f5 18 ♘d6 ♗h3.

18 ♖hd1 ♗f5

18...♗g4 would not dissuade White from the planned 19 ♖d7, since then 19...♗xd1 fails to 20 ♗xf7+ ♔h8 21 ♗xe8 ♗f3 22 ♖e7, while 18...♗e6 19 ♗xe6 ♖xe6 20 ♖d8+ favours White.

19 ♖d7!

This probably slipped Black's attention.

19...♗xd7

19...♗xe4 loses to 20 ♗xf7+ ♔h8 21 ♗xe8 ♖xe8 22 ♖d8; e.g., 22...♖xd8? 23 ♖xd8+ ♔g7 24 ♖e8 getting back the material with interest.

20 ♖xd7 ♔h8

On 20...♖f8 White would continue 21 ♖e7 (if 21 ♗xa7 then 21...♖ad8 22 ♗xf7+ ♔g7) 21...♗xh2 22 ♗xa7, creating a passed pawn.

21 ♗xf7 ♖ed8

After 21...♗xb2+ 22 ♔xb2 ♖xe4, 23 ♗d4+ ♖xd4 24 ♖xd4 gives White the superior bishop and consequently a superior endgame, while 23 ♗xa7 is even stronger. In case of 21...♗xh2, 22 ♗xe8 ♖xe8 23 ♘f6 wins outright. 21...♗f4 22 ♗xf4 ♖xe4 fails to 23 ♗d2.

22 ♖e7 ♗f4?!

22...♗d4 is stronger.

23 ♗xf4 ♘xf4 24 ♘f6

Black is now compelled to accept a difficult ending to avert the mating threats on h7.

24...♘h5 25 ♘xh5 gxh5 26 ♗xh5 ♖d5 27 h4 ♖d4 28 g6 hxg6 29 ♗xg6 ♖xh4 30 ♖c7 ♖d8

Another pawn must fall: 30...♖h6 31 ♗e4 ♖d8 32 b3, etc.

31 b3 ♖d6 32 ♗e8 ♖h7 33 ♖c8 ♔g7?

Correct was 33...♖g7 34 ♗xc6+ ♖g8 35 ♖c7 ♖g7 forcing the exchange of a rook pair, which eases the defence.

34 ♗xc6 ♔f6 35 ♗e4 ♖h4 36 ♗d3 ♖d7 37 ♔b2 ♔e7 38 ♗b5 ♖b7 39 a4 ♖d4 40 ♔a3 ♖d8 41 ♖c4 ♖d6 42 b4 ♔d8 43 ♖h4 ♖g7 44 ♔b3 ♔c7 45 a5 ♖dg6 46 ♗d3 ♖g1 47 c3 ♖1g3 48 ♗f5 ♔b7 49 ♖h6 ♔b8 50 b5 ♖e7 51 ♔b4 ♖ge3 52 ♖d6 ♖e8 53 c4 ♖3e5 54 ♖f6 ♖8e7 55 b6 axb6 56 axb6 ♔b7 57 c5 ♖e2 58 ♔c4 ♖e8 59 ♖d6 ♖8e7 60 ♖d8 ♖e8 61 ♖d7+ ♔b8 62 c6 1-0

The old recommendation can still serve Black, but it demands more accurate play in the delicate phase of the early middlegame.

Spassky – Polugaevsky

USSR Ch, Leningrad 1960
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 b5 8 ♗d3

In comparison with the previous games, also characterized by the 'small centre' and an early pawn advance by Black on the queenside, White adopts a more aggressive stance in harmony with the more aggressive position of his dark-squared bishop. Such a set-up in the centre will expose his e4-pawn to pressure from the b7-bishop, which explains Spassky's natural continuation. The most critical line is 8 e5, blowing open the centre,

which we saw in two games in Chapter 2.

8...♘bd7

Black establishes control over e5 as early as possible.

9 f5

9 ♕e2 ♕b6 10 ♘f3 ♗b7 allows Black to develop his forces comfortably, so White decides to act at once.

9...e5 10 ♘c6 ♕b6 11 ♘b4

The point is obvious: White would like to control the d5-square. However, d5 is well protected by pieces, while the d3-bishop does little to support the claim.

11...♗b7 12 ♕e2 ♗e7 13 0-0-0

White's ambitions have finally been outlined: after the initial phase a major threat has emerged – a pawn-storm on the kingside.

13...♖c8

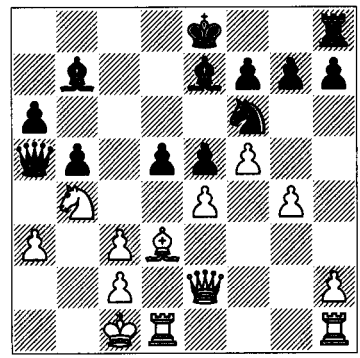
In case of 13...0-0-0 14 g4 followed by 15 ♗xf6 and 16 g5, the manoeuvre ♘c6-b4 would be entirely justified. Something has to be done about it, no doubt. 13...a5 14 ♗e3 ♕d8 15 ♘bd5 ♘xd5 16 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 is somewhat passive and so Black chooses something more energetic.

14 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 15 g4 ♕a5 16 a3 ♖xc3!

While g5 was hanging in the air, the exchange sacrifice on c3, in those days already a well-known counter-attacking weapon, weakens not only White's king's defences, but also his grip on d5.

17 bxc3 d5! *(D)*

The point of the sacrifice was to make this central counterblow possible. The threat of g5 loses its impact,



and a precious moment of relief has been gained.

18 exd5 0-0!?

Black had at his disposal the cautious 18...♕xa3+, when 19 ♔b1 0-0 20 ♕xe5 would transpose to the game continuation. However, he sought a more subtle solution, removing the king to a peaceful refuge at g8 and planning to expose the white king to a violent attack.

19 ♕xe5

After 19 ♔b2 ♘xd5, White is threatened with demolition by 20...♘xc3, and would need to turn to 20 f6. Polugaevsky then had in mind 20...♘xf6 21 g5 e4, when 22 gxf6 is answered with 22...♗xf6 23 ♗xe4 ♗xc3+. More difficult to meet would be 22 ♖hf1 (White is not ready to tolerate the appearance of the dark-squared bishop on f6), when Black must look for extreme measures. He would turn to 22...♖c8 23 gxf6 (or 23 ♕e1 ♘d7 24 ♗xe4 ♘b6) 23...♖xc3 24 fxe7 ♕xa3+ 25 ♔b1 ♕xb4+ 26 ♔c1 ♕xe7 27 ♗xe4 ♕a3+ 28 ♔d2 ♕b4.

19...♕xa3+ 20 ♔b1

Running to d2 helps little: 20 ♔d2 ♗xb4 21 cxb4 ♕xb4+ offers no consolation.

20...♗xb4?!

After the game Polugaevsky understood that he should have been patient a little longer. 20...♗c5! causes White insurmountable difficulties.

21 cxb4 ♘xd5?

Polugaevsky explained that in case of 21...♕xb4+ 22 ♕b2 ♕c5 (the alternative 22...♕xb2+ 23 ♔xb2 ♘xg4 is also in Black's favour) he was worried because of 23 c4 and missed the winning 23...bxc4 24 ♕xb7 ♕d6! followed by 25...♖b8.

22 ♕b2 ♘c3+ 23 ♔c1 ♘a2+ 24 ♔b1 ♘c3+ ½-½

The pawn-thrust in the centre which met the wing action was perfectly timed and effective. One has the feeling that White was caught with his leg in the air and lost his natural balance. That same impression recurs whenever the central counterblow is appropriate and timely. All the examples we have analysed confirm the old advice: when attacked on the wing, strike in the centre. However, the chances to do so are not so frequent as popularly believed. I have never kept statistics on the matter, nor do I set much store by them, but considering a very large number of games played in the second half of the 20th century, I have had a strong impression that examples which confirm the old formula are in decline. I have quite often encountered cases in which counterplay in the centre failed or involved a high degree of risk to say the least. I shall choose between numerous examples, played in various periods.

Spassky – Evans

Olympiad, Varna 1962
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 c6 6 ♗e3 a6

From the outset, the Sämisch Variation of the King's Indian was conceived as an offensive weapon. Having built a firm pawn-centre, strengthened by f3, White plans to castle queenside, thus fulfilling two basic preconditions for launching a violent kingside attack. Black's response is somewhat unusual. He prepares to expand on the queenside, deterring White from castling long.

7 ♕d2 b5

Black is justifiably wary. After 7...0-0 8 h4 b5 9 h5 ♘bd7 10 ♗h6 his position would deteriorate all of a sudden.

8 0-0-0 bxc4?!

An impatient decision. It is still too early to castle kingside, but keeping the tension by 8...♕a5 is definitely better. 9 e5 could then be met by 9...b4 and 9 ♔b1 by 9...♘bd7 10 ♗h6 ♗xh6 11 ♕xh6 ♖b8.

9 ♗xc4 0-0?

For some reason Black decided he had waited long enough, but we shall soon see that he has castled into a brutal attack. 9...d5 10 ♗b3 dxe4 11 fxe4 ♘g4 would alleviate the threat.

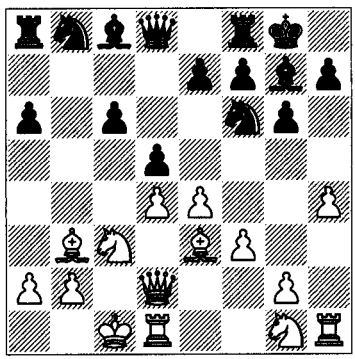
10 h4 d5

Black reacts to the h-pawn's advance as prescribed – by striking in

the centre. Unfortunately, it is a badly prepared reaction.

11 ♗b3 *(D)*

B



Now White threatens e5 as well as h5.

11...dxe4

If Black tries to block the h-pawn's advance by 11...h5, then 12 e5 ♘e8 13 g4 hxg4 14 h5 rips open the kingside. Evans was relying on White recapturing on e4, but he had missed a little tactical point.

12 h5!

The central counterplay is a step too slow. White opens the vital file at a slight cost but at a moment when Black's queenside pieces are still on their initial squares; too much time has been invested in pawn moves of little use.

12...exf3

Let us note that 12...♘xh5 13 g4 ♘f6 looks pretty bad for Black after 14 ♗h6 or 14 ♕h2 exf3 15 ♘e4 ♘bd7 16 g5 ♘h5 17 ♘g3 (the latter line given by Florian).

13 hxg6 hxg6 14 ♗h6 fxg2 15 ♖h4

No time to lose on worthless material!

15...♘g4 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 ♕xg2

Having opened the critical file, White attacks with superior forces.

17...♘h6

17...♘e3 loses a piece to 18 ♕h2, while 17...f5 18 ♘f3 ♖h8 19 ♖xh8 ♕xh8 20 ♖h1 announces the end.

18 ♘f3 ♘f5 19 ♖h2 ♕d6

Black cannot oppose on the open file by 19...♖h8 20 ♖dh1 ♖h6 because of 21 ♖xh6 ♘xh6 22 ♕h2 ♕h8 23 ♕e5+. 19...♘e3 fails for similar reasons as earlier, this time due to 20 ♕g5.

20 ♘e5 ♘d7

Or 20...♘xd4 21 ♕g5.

21 ♘e4 ♕c7 22 ♖dh1 ♖g8 23 ♖h7+ ♔f8 24 ♖xf7+ ♔e8 25 ♕xg6 ♘xe5 26 ♖f8+ 1-0

Several reasons caused the failure of Black's counterplay. Some of them, such as his delay in exchanging in the centre and castling into an oncoming storm, are particular to the position in question, but exploring deeper we cannot overlook the more general problems of slow development and lack of meaningful counterplay.

Mariotti – Gligorić

Zonal tournament, Praia da Rocha 1969

King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 c5 6 d5 0-0 7 ♗e2 e6

White has invested heavily in his pawn-centre. Looking for counterchances while White's king is still in

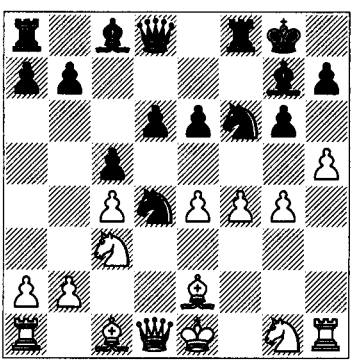
the centre, Black naturally tries to open the e-file.

8 dxe6 fxe6

By taking with the pawn, Black covers the d5-square, perhaps hoping to make a later breakthrough in the centre. However, he also weakens his kingside considerably. 8...♗xe6 is a good alternative. Then 9 ♘f3 ♘c6 10 0-0 ♗g4 11 h3 ♗xf3 12 ♗xf3 ♖e8 13 f5 ♘d7 demonstrates that the apparent weakness of the backward d6-pawn is well compensated by his control over the central dark squares, as proven in the old game Niemela-Nei, Riga 1959.

9 g4 ♘c6 10 h4 ♘d4 11 h5 *(D)*

B



Although his king is still in the centre and his queenside undeveloped, White launches an early, vicious pawn-storm against Black's king.

11...d5?

Black responds according to the book, but his central counterblow, apparently energetic, soon shows signs of weakness. Later analysis points out that Black's reaction is premature. 11...b5, followed by ...♗b7, would strengthen the central thrust significantly.

12 e5 ♘e4 13 hxg6 hxg6 14 ♕d3

Most unpleasant. All of a sudden the centralized knights are under strong pressure, while at the same time 15 ♕h3 is hanging over Black's head.

14...b5

Too late.

15 ♘xe4 bxc4 16 ♕h3 dxe4 17 ♕h7+ ♔f7 18 f5

Rightly disregarding the check at c2, White opens diagonals for his bishops to finish off the job.

18...exf5 19 ♖h6 ♘c2+ 20 ♔f1 fxg4 21 ♔g2 ♘e1+ 22 ♔h1 ♘d3 23 ♕xg6+ ♔g8 24 ♕h7+ ♔f7 25 ♗e3

White starts the final assault by activating the reserve forces.

25...♕e7 26 ♖f1+ ♔e8 27 ♕g6+ ♖f7 28 ♕c6+ ♕d7 29 ♖e6+ ♔f8 30 ♗xc5+ ♘xc5 31 ♕xc5+ ♔g8 32 ♖d6 ♕b7 33 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 34 ♗xc4+ ♔e8 35 ♗d5 ♕e7 36 ♕c6+ ♔f8 37 ♕xa8 ♕h4+ 38 ♔g2 1-0

Black's counterblow in the centre failed because it was not supported in the required measure and because it was not well timed.

Yakovich – Lerner
Kuibyshev 1986
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗e2 g6 7 ♗e3 ♗g7 8 ♘b3 0-0 9 f4

This option against the Dragon looks somewhat mild. For the time being White is satisfied to control the

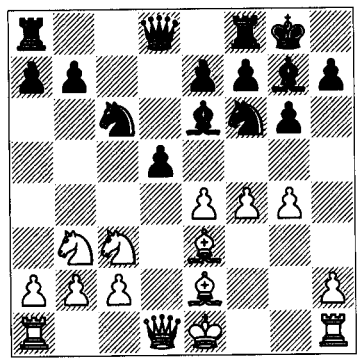
centre. 9 f3 could be met by 9...d5 10 exd5 ♘b4, but the text-move prevents it.

9...♗e6

The Ukrainian master Veresov remarked that Black can play 9...a5, provoking 10 a4, when after 10...♗e6 11 g4 Black can comfortably play 11...♘b4.

10 g4 d5?! *(D)*

W



This position, which arose in the famous draw Alekhine-Botvinnik, Nottingham 1936, has for decades been a recommended pattern of Black's play and decorated regularly in all the texts on the subject of the central counterblow. Although White has not finished his development, he launches this early attack in the hope of driving back Black's pieces and finishing his development, whereupon his superiority in the centre will be unquestionable. What can Black do to thwart his intentions? His reaction has been consistent and by the book.

11 f5 ♗c8 12 exd5 ♘b4 13 ♗f3!

In the aforementioned game Alekhine continued 13 d6 but Botvinnik's ingenious play kept the game level after 13...♕xd6 14 ♗c5 ♕f4 15 ♖f1 ♕xh2 16 ♗xb4 ♘xg4 17 ♗xg4 ♕g3+ 18 ♖f2 ♕g1+. The text-move was played a quarter of a century later in Fischer-Reshevsky, Match (game 2), New York/Los Angeles 1961. White could include 13 fxg6 hxg6, but that changes the situation and permits Black a promising sacrificial line recommended by Fischer: 14 ♗f3 ♗xg4 15 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 16 ♕xg4 ♘xc2+ 17 ♔f2 ♘xa1 18 ♖xa1 ♖c8!.

13...gxf5 14 a3

If a4 had been provoked earlier, this move would not be available.

14...fxg4 15 ♗g2

This is stronger than 15 axb4 gxf3 16 ♕xf3 ♗g4 17 ♕g2 ♗h5 18 ♗h6 ♗g6 19 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 20 0-0-0 ♕d6.

15...♘a6 16 ♕d3

White prepares to castle and prevents the stabilizing move 16...♗f5. Assessing the consequences of the breakthrough, we note that White has fine compensation for the sacrificed pawn in his active pieces, a secure refuge for his king and the visibly weakened black kingside.

16...♘d7

Reshevsky played 16...e6 17 0-0-0 ♘xd5, but 18 h3! accentuated the lasting weakness of his kingside. In Oll-Pigusov, Beijing 1997, after 16...♘c7 17 0-0-0 ♘ce8 18 h3 the same problem arose. Disappointed, Black has recently tried 16...♕d6 17 0-0-0 ♘h5.

17 0-0-0

On 17 ♗d4 Black had in mind 17...e5! 18 dxe6 ♗xd4 19 ♘xd4 ♘dc5 with powerful counterplay.

17...♘e5 18 ♕e2 ♕c7 19 ♗d4?!

19 h3 is again the consistent move, opening the position on the kingside.

19...♘g6 20 ♗xg7 ♕f4+?

At f4 the queen is exposed to attacks which will just accelerate the full engagement of the white pieces.

21 ♔b1 ♔xg7 22 h3 h5

After 22...g3 the pawn is doomed, but after the text-move Black's kingside is further debilitated.

23 ♖d4 ♕e5 24 ♕d2 gxh3

On 24...♗d7, 25 d6 is unpleasant, but the alternative 24...♘c7 comes into consideration.

25 ♗xh3 ♗xh3 26 ♖xh3 ♖ad8 27 ♖e4 ♕f5 28 ♕g2

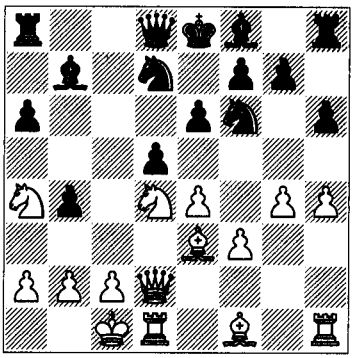
White threatens 29 ♘d4 at a critical moment when the e7- and h5-pawns badly need protection. The well-coordinated white pieces will soon prevail.

28...♕d7 29 ♘d4 ♖h8 30 ♖xe7 ♕g4 31 ♖g3 ♕xd4 32 ♖xg6+ ♔f8 33 ♖xb7 ♘c5 34 ♖b4 ♕e5 35 ♕f2 ♕e7 36 d6 ♕e5 37 ♖f6 ♖h7 38 ♖f5 ♕xd6 39 ♖xc5 ♖e8 40 ♖d5 1-0

As we have seen, little nuances can completely change the sensitive relations between the centre and the wings. These features must be considered attentively.

Tiviakov – Rashkovsky
Anibal Open, Linares 1999
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 ♕d2 b5 8 f3 ♗b7 9 g4 h6 10 0-0-0 ♘bd7 11 h4 b4 12 ♘a4 d5 *(D)*


W

We have seen this position already, but with an apparently minor difference: the queen's knight was on e2 or on b1 instead on a4. On closer inspection, we conclude that the difference is significant. On one hand, the knight is neither passive (as it is at b1) nor later exposed to attack by ...exf3 (as it is on e2). On the negative side, it is exposed to attack on a4. We shall see how this affects the value of Black's counterblow in the centre.

13 ♗h3 ♕a5

In Kasparov-Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2000, Black responded 13...g5, an idea we already know from a somewhat different position. Unfortunately, after 14 ♗g2, instead of playing the logical 14...♖g8, Van Wely folded under the pressure: 14...gxh4? 15 ♖xh4 dxe4 16 g5 ♘d5 (or 16...exf3 17 ♘xf3 ♘d5 18 ♗d4) 17 ♖xe4 came back as a boomerang to Black's breakthrough in the centre. All of a sudden the pressure was on the e6-pawn. 17...♘xe3 loses to 18 ♘xe6, and 17...hxg5 18 ♗xg5 (as played in the game) 18...♕xg5 19 ♕xg5 ♗h6 again loses due to 20 ♘xe6.

In our main game, Black will collapse on the same vulnerable point in a couple of moves' time.

14 b3

Black must now address the threat of 15 g5.

14...♘c5?

Now the king's knight is ready to run to d7. 14...e5 15 g5 and 14...dxe4 15 g5 are also unappealing for Black.

There remains 14...g5. Commenting upon this game, Tiviakov gives "15 hxg5 hxg5 16 ♗xg5 dxe4 17 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 18 g5 with the initiative". After 18...exf3 (the knight is taboo due to 19...♗h6) 19 ♕f4 (or 19 ♕e3) the e6-pawn is in mortal danger. However, 18...♕e5 further complicates things. For instance, 19 f4 e3 and now:

a) 20 ♕d3 ♕e4 (but not 20...♕xf4 due to 21 ♘xe6) 21 gxf6 ♕xd3 22 cxd3 ♖c8+ 23 ♔b1 ♗xh1 24 ♖xh1 ♖d8.

b) 20 ♕h2 ♕e4 21 gxf6 ♖d8 22 ♘xe6 (22 ♘e2? loses to 22...♖d2) exposes the black king, renewing the threats. 22...♖d2 is not available any more because of 23 ♘c7+ ♔d8 24 ♖xd2+ exd2+ 25 ♕xd2+ ♔xc7 26 ♖d1, while 22...♖xd1+ 23 ♖xd1 fxe6 24 f5 causes new problems. Black should consider 22...fxe6 at once.

15 g5 ♘xa4

It is still unpleasant to me to recall the crushing loss Palac suffered in spite of his material advantage against Nedev in the match Croatia-Macedonia, Olympiad, Erevan 1996, after 15...♘fd7 16 g6 e5 17 gxf7+ ♔xf7 18 exd5 exd4 19 ♗xd4.

16 bxa4 hxg5 17 hxg5 ♖xh3

We saw this motif in Anand-Ljubojević (page 168), but here it happens under much worse circumstances for Black. However, it is true that 17...♕xa4 18 ♔b1 does not avoid the question and 17...♘d7 18 g6 looks hopeless for Black.

18 ♖xh3 ♘d7 19 g6 ♕xa4 20 gxf7+ ♔xf7 21 ♔b1 e5

21...dxe4 wins another pawn, but with Black's pieces strewn about the board the game remains difficult for him. 22 ♗g5 then seems strong.

22 ♘b3 ♖c8

Tiviakov suggests 22...d4 as stronger, but then 23 f4 should be considered in order to open the position. For instance: 23...♗xe4 24 fxe5, 23...♘f6 24 ♕e2 ♘xe4 25 ♕c4+ or 23...dxe3 24 ♕xd7+ ♕xd7 25 ♖xd7+ ♔e6 26 ♖xb7 exf4 27 ♖h5 ♖d8 28 ♖b6+, etc.

23 ♖h5 d4 24 ♖f5+ ♔e8 25 ♕h2 ♕c6

White was threatening ♖xe5+.

26 ♘a5 ♕e6 27 ♗xd4 g6 28 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 29 ♘xb7 exd4 30 ♕h8+ 1-0

Zulfugarli – Cvitan

European Team Ch, Batumi 1999
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗e3 b5 7 ♕d2 ♘f6 8 f3 ♗b7 9 0-0-0 ♘bd7 10 g4 h6 11 h4 b4 12 ♘a4 ♕a5

If Black decides to harass the a4-knight then this is the proper moment to do so. After ...d5 has been carried out, the queen does best to stay at d8 for the time being.

13 b3 ♘c5

This move is consistent with the previous move and is in harmony with the pawn-structure. This is how Kasparov reacted in the same position in his game versus Topalov at Linares 1999.

14 a3

The continuation obviously hinges on this move. It wins material, but weakens the white king's pawn-cover after a series of forced moves.

14...♘xa4

We did not wait long for an alternative, as 14...♖c8 15 ♕xb4 ♕c7 was subsequently investigated:

a) 16 ♘xc5 dxc5 17 ♕a4+ ♘d7 18 ♘e2 c4 gave Black good counterplay in Tiviakov-Van Wely, Dutch Ch, Rotterdam 2000.

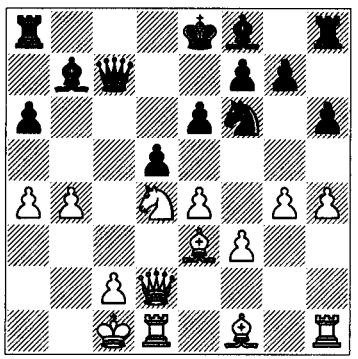
b) However, a couple of recent games with 16 ♔b1 have aroused new uncertainties:

b1) The game Anand-Khalifman, FIDE World Cup, Shenyang 2000 continued 16...♘cd7 17 ♕d2 d5 18 ♗h3 threatening 19 g5 with the initiative.

b2) In case of 16...d5 I considered 17 ♘xc5 (17 ♗b5+ would be met by 17...♘cd7) 17...♗xc5 18 ♕a4+ ♔f8 19 e5 ♘d7 (19...♗xd4 20 ♕xd4 ♕xc2+ 21 ♔a1 would not please Black) 20 ♗xa6? (20 b4 is better), but 20...♘b6 21 ♕a5 ♗xa6 22 ♕xa6 ♗xd4 23 ♗xd4 ♕xc2+ 24 ♔a1 ♖a8 refutes it.

b3) I find interesting Van Wely's attempt 16...♘fd7, based on continuations like 17 ♖d2 d5 (in case of 17...a5 there is 18 ♕c4 d5 19 exd5 ♗xd5 20 ♘b5) 18 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 19 ♕a4 0-0 (but not 19...dxe4 because of 20 ♘xe6). However, 17 ♖c1 d5 (17...a5 18 ♕c3 ♘xa4 19 ♕xc7 ♖xc7 20 bxa4 favours White) 18 exd5 can be considered.

15 axb4 ♕c7 16 bxa4 d5 *(D)*



Having weakened White's queenside, Black strikes in the centre. The counterblow comes somewhat later than in previous examples, but this time with a double purpose: to pre-empt g5 and to expose White's queenside pawns to pressure.

17 e5 ♘d7

The e5-pawn is taboo: 17...♕xe5? 18 ♗f4.

18 f4 ♘b6

White's pawn moves have strengthened the position of the dominant knight at d4, but Black gets time to move the knight to b6, where it eyes two weaknesses – the point a4 and the hole at c4.

19 f5

In the aforementioned game Topalov-Kasparov White continued 19 a5, but after 19...♘c4 20 ♕c3 ♕e7 found himself in difficulties. In subsequent games White preferred 19 ♖h3, giving

up the material advantage and focussing on strengthening his loose queenside. 19...♘xa4 20 ♗f2 ♖c8 21 ♗e1, tried by Bologan in a couple of games, did the task, but did not impress. The text-move, a favourite of the young Muscovite Alexander Grishchuk, has proved to be more dangerous for Black. Not losing time on the defence of the queenside, White takes offensive counter-measures in the centre. Attack and defence sway constantly from the wings to the centre and back. The whole board becomes a battlefield and the more the fight gets entangled and mutually dependent on the state of different sectors of the board, the more difficult the assessment of the position becomes.

19...♘xa4

Winning back material in such a sharp position looks perilous and indeed Black was soon looking for a promising alternative. It seemed that 19...♘c4 exposed White's king more quickly and efficiently. Then 20 ♗xc4 ♕xc4 21 fxe6 ♗xb4 22 exf7+ ♔xf7 23 ♕d3 ♕a2 24 ♖df1+ ♔g8 25 ♔d1 a5 26 ♕f5 ♕a1+ 27 ♔e2 ♗a6+ 28 ♘b5 ♕xa4 constrained White to take a draw by perpetual check in Tiviakov-Danailov, Wijk aan Zee open 2000. However, the counter-reaction also came quickly. In Hraček-Stohl, Slovakian Team Ch 2000, White replied 20 ♕e1 ♘xe3 21 ♕xe3 ♗xb4 22 fxe6 0-0 23 g5.

20 fxe6 ♘c3 21 exf7+ ♔xf7 22 ♗d3 ♗xb4

Following 22...♘xd1 23 e6+ ♔g8 24 ♔xd1 White seems to have good compensation for the exchange. Besides, taking on b4 is what Black was looking for.

23 ♖df1+ ♔g8 24 ♕f2

At first glance the position of the white king seems critical, but several exciting recent games prove to the contrary.

24...♗a3+

Since 24...♖f8? obviously loses to 25 ♕xf8+, etc., in the game Grishchuk-V.Popov, St Petersburg 1999, Black tried to do it smartly by 24...♖e8 25 e6 ♖f8, but was struck by 26 ♕f7+! ♖xf7 27 exf7+ ♕xf7 28 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 29 ♖f1+, which gave White a comfortable endgame. 24...♘a2+ 25 ♔b2 ♗c3+ 26 ♔b1 does not solve Black's difficulties either: he continues to be vulnerable on f7 and f8 in various continuations we can envisage.

25 ♔d2 ♗b4?

This does look strong at first glance, but on a closer inspection the threat of a discovered check proves to be just a blank charge. It was the right moment to force the exchange of the light-squared bishop by 25...♘e4+ 26 ♗xe4 dxe4. I can add that Shirov-Anand, Olympic exhibition, Sydney 2000 continued 27 g5 (if 27 ♕f5 then Black replies 27...♗b4+ 28 ♔d1 ♕c4, as in Anand-Gelfand, FIDE World Cup, Shenyang 2000) 27...♗d5 28 gxh6 ♗b2, leading to a draw.

26 ♕f5 ♖e8

In the earlier game Grishchuk-Ibragimov, European Team Ch, Batumi 1999, Black resorted to 26...♘e4++ 27 ♔d1 ♖f8, but after 28 ♕e6+ ♔h7 29 g5! he fell under a strong attack.

27 e6 ♘e4++

Although living under constant threat in his temporary prison at d2, the white king would survive 27...♖f8 28 ♕g6 ♖xf1 29 ♖xf1 ♕h2+ by 30 ♖f2 ♘e4++ 31 ♔e2 ♘c3+ 32 ♔e1 ♕h1+ (or 32...♘e4+ 33 c3!) 33 ♗f1 ♘e4+ 34 ♔e2 ♘xf2, when 35 ♘f5! wins.

28 ♔d1 ♕g3

Bad, but 28...♖f8 29 ♕g6 does not offer Black much hope either.

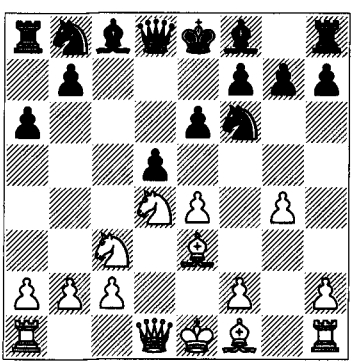
29 ♕f7+ ♔h7 30 ♖f3 ♕b8 31 ♖f6! 1-0

♖xh6# cannot be averted.

Shirov – Ki. Georgiev
Belgrade 1997
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 g4 d5 *(D)*

W



In the pure Keres Attack, where ♗e3 and ...a6 have not been played, such a response in the centre is unsatisfactory due to 7 exd5 ♘xd5 8 ♗b5+ ♗d7 9 ♘xd5 exd5 10 ♕e2+ ♕e7 11 ♗e3 with advantage to White, as in Fischer-Reshevsky, USA Ch, New York 1966/7. The extra moves enable Black to react at once.

8 g5!?

In Anand-J.Polgar, Dos Hermanas 1998, we saw 8 exd5 ♘xd5 9 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 10 ♖g1 ♘d7. Black obviously had in mind 11 ♗g2 ♕c4 or 11 ♕d2 ♘e5, while 11 c3 ♗e7 12 ♗g2 ♕c4 13 ♕b3 ♕c7 achieved little for White in the game.

It is of interest to us that in Tseshkovsky-Palatnik, USSR 1980, after 8 e5 ♘fd7 9 f4 ♗e7 10 ♕f3 ♘c6 11 0-0-0 Black struck with 11...g5 and had good play.

8...♘xe4 9 ♘xe4 dxe4 10 ♕g4 ♕a5+

10...♘d7 comes into serious consideration.

11 c3 ♗d7

In Shirov's opinion 11...♗e7 12 h4 ♗d7 13 ♕xe4 ♘c6 14 ♘b3 ♕e5 15 ♗g2 0-0-0 is better, but 16 ♕xe5 ♘xe5 17 ♘a5 ♘c6 (or 17...♗b5 18 ♗xb7+ ♔c7 19 a4) 18 ♘c4 does not support his view. It looks like Black keeps his bishop at f8 in expectation of ...h6, gxh6 g6 occurring some time later in the game.

12 ♕xe4 ♘c6 13 ♘b3

This is necessary to stop Black playing ...♘xd4, but the knight retreats for other good reasons too: his bishop will have access to b6 and his knight to c5 or a5.

13...♕e5 14 ♗g2 ♕xe4

If 14...0-0-0, then 15 ♕xe5 ♘xe5 16 ♘a5 ♘c6 17 ♘c4.

15 ♗xe4 ♗e7

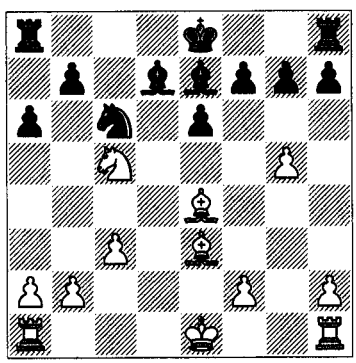
Black has entered an inferior endgame due to his compromised queenside and starts to experience problems. He does not like 15...0-0-0 because of 16 ♗b6, 15...♘d8 due to 16 ♘a5, while in case of 15...h6 White does not have to take at h6, but continues 16 g6 f5 17 ♗g2 with better chances.

Thus Black returns to the ...♗e7 approach in worsened circumstances.

16 ♘c5! *(D)*

Black was hoping for 16 0-0-0 0-0-0, when 17 ♗b6 is not available, while 17 ♘c5 ♗e8 satisfies Black.

B



16...0-0-0?!

16...♗xc5 17 ♗xc5 h6 (17...♘e5 is worse due to 18 ♗d4) comes into consideration, although after 18 g6 f5 19 ♗g2 ♘e5 20 ♗xb7 (or 20 ♗d4 ♘c6) 20...♖b8 21 ♗xa6 ♗c6 (or 21...♖xb2 22 a4) 22 0-0-0 Black remains worse off. However, by playing timidly he increases his discomfort.

17 ♘xd7

Simple and quite unpleasant. Black's loss of the bishop-pair is added to his inferior pawn-structure.

17...♖xd7 18 ♔e2 ♘e5 19 ♖ad1 ♖c7

19...♖xd1 20 ♖xd1 h6 21 ♗d4 is also advantageous to White, but preferable to the passive text-move, which leads to a hopeless endgame.

20 b3 f5 21 gxf6 gxf6 22 f4 ♘d7 23 f5 e5 24 ♗d5

White's mastery of the open file, his superior pawn-structure and the powerful light-squared bishop define his advantage. He now threatens to win outright by ♗e6.

24...♔b8 25 c4 ♗c5 26 ♖hg1 b5 27 ♖g4

27 ♖g7 is also winning.

27...♗xe3 28 ♔xe3 ♘b6 29 ♗e6 bxc4 30 bxc4 h5 31 ♖h4 ♘a4 32 ♖d6 ♘c5 33 ♗d5 ♖h6 34 ♖h3 h4 35 ♖f3 ♖d7

Sometimes the greatest problem is that one has to move.

36 ♖b6+ ♔a7 37 ♖c6 ♘a4 38 ♔e2 ♖b7 39 ♖b3 ♖xb3 40 axb3 ♘c3+ 41 ♔d3

So that in case of 41...♘xd5 42 cxd5 h3 43 ♔c4 the king crosses the fourth rank in support of his passed pawn.

41...♘a2 42 ♖c8 h3 43 ♗e4 ♔b6 44 c5+ ♔a5

Or 44...♔b5 45 c6 ♖h7 46 ♖f8, etc.

45 ♖b8 1-0

Once again we see the extreme sensitivity of positions characterized by simultaneous pawn movements in different sectors of the board. The relation between the centre and the wings, attack and counterattack, has grown so subtle that no general advice holds very tightly. In each particular case a number of specific factors condition

decisions about which strategic plans to reject and on which to pin one's hopes. Naturally, the old maxim – when attacked on the wing, strike back in the centre – is as valid as ever, but with an additional condition: if you can!

The Wing Attack Countered on the Same Wing

Fortunately, it is not only in the centre that a wing attack can be countered. Simultaneous counterplay on the other wing is another natural response (this is discussed in the final section of this chapter), but in recent decades examples in which the attacked side parries on the same wing have grown in number. The strategy is not new – we encountered it in various systems a long time ago – but in the last 10-20 years it has been applied to a variety of new positions with great audacity and imagination. In my youth some of these attempts would have been inconceivable. Only some lunatic would dare to play so in blitz games and his acrobatics would be accompanied by derisive smiles of the connoisseurs. Today it is a reality to which we must devote attention.

The following games are characterized by a pawn advance on a wing being met by a pawn reaction on the same wing: the attacked side tries to stop the pawn advance by advancing his own pawns. The task of the advancing pawn is to seize space and then to open a file for the major pieces; the purpose of the counterstrike is to thwart both ideas. In most cases the file in question is the rook's file (generally we are talking about the kingside, so the h-file), but sometimes the knight's file (g-file) too. It is just a moment in the struggle, but the crucial moment, which greatly determines the course of the game. Usually there is a choice between two or three unclear possibilities, imbued with latent tactics. It cannot be a light-hearted improvisation and most of the games we analyse bear witness to hard work and home preparation.

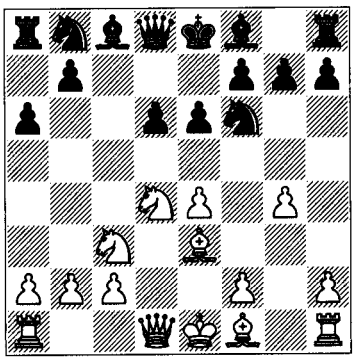
As I pointed out above, the purpose in general is to block the opponent's pawn by establishing a firm, well-propped point in its way. Often, however, the idea is to stop the advance temporarily by a pawn sacrifice in order to get a brief respite, enough to create counterplay in another sector.

Apart from that, there are numerous examples in which such a counter-advance creates active counterplay on the same wing based on making inroads into enemy territory with the minor pieces. Such a commando role is often given to a knight, which by seizing a post in the enemy camp unexpectedly changes the flow of events. We shall see all of this in the illustrative games that follow.

Šolak – Nisipeanu
Calimanesti 1999
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 g4 *(D)*

B



7...h5!?

This is one of the positions I was talking about. When White plays g4 in the Scheveningen it is generally before developing the queen's bishop to e3, so that after the sequence ...e5, ♘f5, White can meet ...g6 with the natural ♘e3. Here, however, 7...e5 8 ♘f5 g6 leads to a notorious variation in which after 9 g5 gxf5 10 exf5 d5 White seeks compensation in the form of superior development and lasting pressure on the black king, which will remain stranded on e8 for a long time. For instance, 11 gxf6 d4 12 ♗c4 ♕c7 13 ♕d3 dxe3 14 0-0-0, Svidler-Gelfand, Biel 2000, or 11 ♕f3 d4 12 0-0-0 ♘bd7 13 ♗d2 ♕c7 14 gxf6 dxc3 15 ♗xc3, Shirov-Topalov, Linares 2001. It is difficult to discern who is better in these wild confrontations '*à la* Shirov', but it would not be surprising if White's lead in development and Black's material advantage cancelled out in the end.

The text-move was something unheard of in the not-so-distant past. However, if we take a close look at the position we notice that a little difference justifies Black's reaction as logical. 8 gxh5 may transpose into some other lines of the Scheveningen, while 8 g5 ♘g4, as in the game, wins a tempo against the e3-bishop and enables Black to seek counterplay in a novel manner. White's long-term plans on the kingside have been met energetically.

8 g5 ♘g4 9 ♗c1 ♕b6

Black threatens 10...♘c6.

10 h3 ♘e5

Now the threat is 11...♕xd4, and this earns time for further development.

11 ♘b3 ♘bd7

11...♕c7 12 f4 ♘ed7, as played in Anka-Sax, Gyula 1997, arouses some doubts due to the possible reply 13 g6 fxg6 14 ♖g1, which gives White the initiative. The same could be said of 11...♘bc6 12 ♗e3 ♕c7 13 f4 ♘d7 when 14 g6 again looks unpleasant. 11...g6 12 ♗e3 ♕c7 13 f4 ♘ec6 (if 13...♘c4 then 14 ♗d4) 14 a4 ♘b4, as in A.Kovačević-Ilinčić, Yugoslav Ch, Belgrade 1999, seems better.

With the text-move, Nisipeanu postpones ...g6 in expectation of 12 ♗e3 ♕c7, when he would like to be able to meet 13 f4 with 13...♘c4.

12 f4 ♘c6 13 ♕f3

This time 13 g6 fxg6 cannot be justified by the immediate 14 ♖g1; this shows why the queen should not retreat from b6 unless chased away.

13...g6 14 ♗e3?!

It is not clear how wise it is to compel the queen to withdraw to a better position at c7, especially given that

this allows Black to continue with ...b5 and ...♗b7. 14 h4 seems appropriate.

14...♕c7 15 f5?!

This advance is premature as it is not supported by pieces.

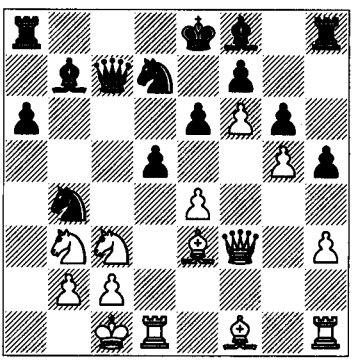
15...b5 16 a3 ♗b7

White now must address the pressure on the long diagonal.

17 f6

White decides to block the kingside, which in itself represents a small defeat, but the fact is that 17 fxe6 fxe6 18 h4 (or 18 ♘d4 ♘ce5) 18...♗g7 19 ♗h3 ♗xc3+ 20 bxc3 ♘ce5 is very good for Black.

17...b4 18 axb4 ♘xb4 19 0-0-0 d5! *(D)*



Having neutralized White's kingside play, Black is now ready to open up the centre and the queenside.

20 ♕f2

20 exd5 ♗xd5 21 ♖xd5 exd5 22 ♕e2 0-0-0 cannot satisfy White.

20...dxe4 21 ♗g2 ♖c8 22 ♖d2 ♘d5 23 ♖hd1 ♗b4 24 ♗xe4 ♗xc3

In case of 24...♘xc3 25 ♖xd7 ♘xd1 26 ♖xc7 ♘xf2 there was a little trick – 27 ♗c6+!, which Black saw through and avoided.

25 bxc3 0-0

At the end of the complications, Black's king has found a peaceful refuge, while his counterpart remains only superficially protected.

26 ♗d4 a5 27 c4 ♘b4 28 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 29 ♗b2 ♘b6 30 ♘xa5 ♕a6 31 c5 ♘a4 32 ♘b3 ♘a2+ 33 ♔b1 ♘2c3+

Time-trouble. Simple was 33...♘xb2 34 ♔xb2 ♖a8, etc.

34 ♗xc3 ♘xc3+ 35 ♔b2 ♘xd1+ 36 ♖xd1 ♖a8 37 ♖d7 ♖fb8 38 ♔c3 ♕c6 39 ♕d4 ♕f3+ 40 ♕d3

Or 40 ♔b2 ♕f1, and Black is threatening mate.

40...♕f4 41 c6

41 ♖xf7 fails to 41...♖xb3+ 42 cxb3 ♕c1+, etc.

41...♕b4+ 42 ♔b2 ♕a3+ 43 ♔c3 ♕b4+ 44 ♔b2 ♕a4 0-1

Black threatens mate at a1 again and the c6-pawn falls.

Gershon – Lutz

Tel-Aviv 1999

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 g4 h6 8 h4 ♘c6

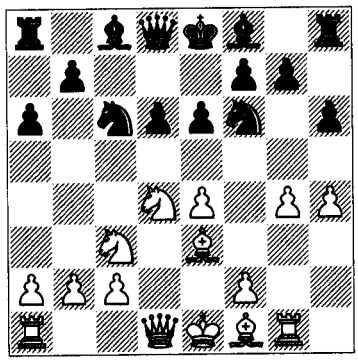
We should note that 8...e5 9 ♘f5 g6 this time fails to 10 ♘xh6.

9 ♖g1 *(D)*

9...h5

We examined a very similar position, in which ♗e3 and ...a6 were not played (page 163) and in which the reaction in the centre by ...d5 proved effective; however, one should not

B



underrate such 'minor' differences. Here after 9...d5 10 exd5 ♘xd5 11 ♘xd5 exd5 (or 11...♕xd5 12 ♗g2 ♕a5+ 13 c3 ♗d7 14 ♕b3) 12 g5 hxg5 13 hxg5 ♖h4 14 g6 f6 15 ♕d2 White's position is favourable, as in Stoica-Ghitescu, Paris 1982.

Lutz perceives that the position of the bishop on e3 enables him to respond on the kingside, as in the previous game.

10 gxh5

This time 10 g5 ♘g4 11 ♗c1 does not work due to 11...♕b6.

10...♘xh5 11 ♗e2 ♘f6 12 ♗g5 ♕b6

A somewhat different move-order – 12...♗d7 13 ♕d2 ♕b6 – comes into consideration. Compare the next two notes.

13 ♘b3 ♗d7

13...♕c7 is more accurate in view of the next note.

14 ♕d2

White should continue 14 h5 threatening 15 h6 at a moment when 15...♗e7 does not work due to 16 ♗e3. Here we discern a difference from a popular variation of the Keres Attack: White's rook is on g1 instead of h1, exerting pressure on the g7-pawn.

14...♖c8

Keeping the king in the centre is not without risk, but it makes it possible for Black later to expand on the queenside by ...b5. The alternative for Black was 14...♕c7, preparing to castle queenside.

15 0-0-0?! ♕xf2 16 ♗e3?

The pawn sacrifice was intended to seize the initiative by enticing the queen into a disadvantageous position. It was an optimistic assessment in any case, but unfortunately the text-move misses the narrow hopeful path. 16 h5 is critical, when 16...♘xh5 entangles Black in unpleasant complications after 17 ♖h1 g6 18 e5. However, 16...♕b6 17 h6 ♕c7 18 hxg7 ♗xg7 19 ♗f4 ♗f8 20 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 21 ♕xd6 ♗xd6 22 ♖xd6 ♔e7 gives Black somewhat the better prospects.

16...♕xh4 17 ♗f3 ♘e5

Sometimes we overlook simple moves.

18 ♖h1 ♘xf3 19 ♖xh4 ♘xd2 20 ♖xh8 ♘dxe4

White has paid a high price for an exchange and stands worse. However, the struggle soon takes an unexpected turn.

21 ♘d2!

Finding himself in a predicament, White does not lose his head and pins his hopes on this cunning move.

21...♘xc3 22 bxc3 ♘d5

Black probably rejected 22...♗c6 because of 23 ♘c4 ♘e4 24 ♘xd6+ ♘xd6 25 ♗c5 although he could then

continue 25...♔d7. He also rejected 22...♖xc3 due to 23 ♗d4, although he then has 23...♖c6 24 ♗xf6 (or 24 ♘e4 e5 25 ♘xd6+ ♖xd6 26 ♗c5 ♖xd1+ 27 ♔xd1 ♘h7) 24...gxf6 25 ♘e4 ♔e7.

23 ♘e4

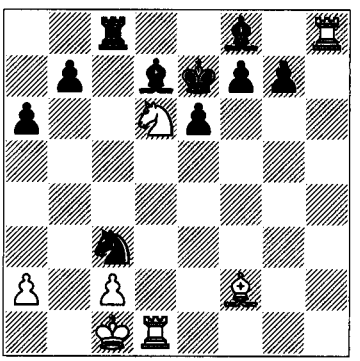
Another little surprise.

23...♔e7

After 23...♘xe3 there is 24 ♘xd6+ ♔e7 25 ♘xc8+ ♗xc8 26 ♖xf8. In case of 23...♖c6 Black probably did not like 24 ♘xd6+ ♔e7 (or 24...♖xd6 25 ♗c5) 25 ♘f5+. Therefore the text-move.

24 ♗f2 ♘xc3 25 ♘xd6 *(D)*

B



25...♖c6?

Trying to realize his advantage safely, Black has finally set a trap for himself and we lose further interest in the game. 25...♖c7 was indispensable.

26 ♗h4+ f6 27 ♗xf6+! gxf6 28 ♖h7+ ♔d8 29 ♘xb7+ ♔c7 30 ♖dxd7+ ♔b6 31 ♘d8 ♗a3+ 32 ♔d2 ♘b1+ 33 ♔d1 ♘c3+ 34 ♔e1 ♖c4 35 ♖b7+ ♔a5 36 ♖b3 ♗b4 37 a3 ♗c5 38 ♘b7+ ♔a4 39 ♖h4 ♖e4+ 40 ♖xe4+ ♘xe4 41 ♘xc5+ ♘xc5 42 ♖b4+ ♔xa3 43 ♖c4 ♘d7 44 ♖c6 a5 45 ♖xe6 a4 46 ♔d2 ♔a2 47 ♖d6 ♘c5 48 ♖b6 a3 49 c4 f5 50 ♖b5 ♘e6 51 ♔c3 f4 52 ♖e5 ♘c7 53 ♖e4 ♘a6 54 ♖xf4 ♘c5 55 ♖f2+ ♔b1 56 ♖e2 1-0

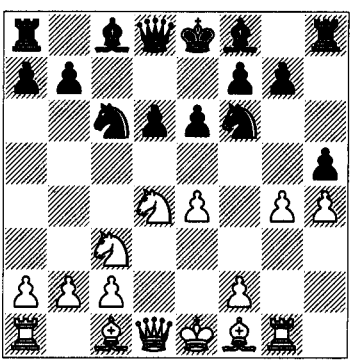
An amusing game. After all it is errors that make the game of chess so attractive. As far as our subject is concerned there is no doubt that 9...h5 stabilized the kingside at the low cost of a backward and potentially weak g7-pawn. The following games address similar issues.

Karpov – Kasparov

World Ch match (game 1), Moscow 1984/5
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 h4 ♘c6 8 ♖g1 h5 *(D)*

W



Although this time the dark-squared bishop has not been developed to e3 and after 9 g5, 9...♘g4 does not come with a gain of tempo, Black is ready to play this as a pawn sacrifice: 10 ♗e2

♕b6 11 ♗xg4 hxg4 12 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 13 ♕xg4 g6.

9 gxh5 ♘xh5 10 ♗g5 ♘f6

10...♕b6 11 ♘b3 is an unfavourable move-order, since it allows White to choose ♕e2 on the next move, leaving the queen better positioned.

After the text-move, White is a tempo up in comparison with the continuation 7 g5 hxg5 8 ♗xg5, but it is of no consequence.

11 ♕d2 ♕b6 12 ♘b3 ♗d7 13 0-0-0 a6

Keeping the king in the centre by 13...♘e5 14 ♖g3 ♖c8 looks dubious in view of 15 ♕e1.

14 ♖g3 ♕c7 15 ♗g2 ♗e7 16 f4 0-0-0

Both sides have achieved their strategic aims: White has some spatial advantage, fully controls the unpredictable formation in the centre and can proceed to probe some potential weaknesses, such as the g7-pawn or the b6-square, or create new ones by advancing his f-pawn. However, Black stands firm, relying on his flexible pawn-structure, which can endure a great deal of pressure. According to Kasparov, 16...♘h5 is best met by 17 ♖d3, when 17...f6 is answered by 18 e5!. Indeed, after 18...d5 19 exf6 gxf6 20 f5 the concentrated white pieces start a strong attack.

17 ♕f2

On 17 ♖d3 Black does not have to sit passively. Kasparov demonstrated 17...♘h5 18 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 19 ♖xd6 ♗c6, when White's loose pawn-structure proves vulnerable.

17...♔b8

Now 17...♘h5 is not so good due to 18 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 19 ♖g5.

18 f5 ♘e5 19 ♗h3 ♘c4 20 ♘d2 ♘xd2 21 ♖xd2 ♖c8 22 fxe6 ♗xe6 23 ♗xe6 fxe6

White has achieved little: both sides have three pawn-islands and some potential worries.

24 ♕g1 ♕a5 25 ♕d4 ♕c5 26 ♕d3 ♕c4 27 ♕e3 ♔a8 28 a3

White protects himself against the possibility of ...♗b4, and plans e5.

28...♕c6

28...♕c5 is better.

29 e5 dxe5 30 ♕xe5 ♖hd8

The reduction of material, despite some difficulties, secures a draw.

31 ♖gd3 ♖xd3 32 ♖xd3 ♕h1+ 33 ♘d1 ♕g2 34 ♖d2 ♕c6 35 ♖e2 ♗d6 36 ♕c3 ♕d7 ½-½

Kotronias – Shipov

Greek Team Ch, Athens 1996
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 g4 h6 7 h4 ♘c6 8 ♖g1 h5 9 gxh5 ♘xh5 10 ♗g5 ♘f6 11 ♗e2

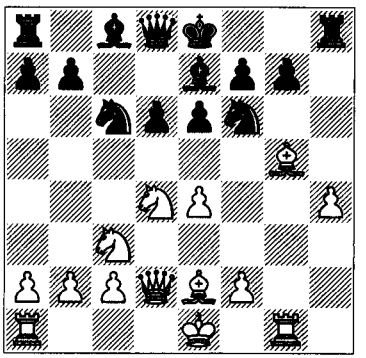
From g2 the bishop would control the centre; from e2 it can support the advance of the pawn to h5, squeezing Black on the wing and sometimes threatening h6.

11...♗e7

Black's usual reaction is 11...♕b6 12 ♘b3 a6 13 ♕d2 ♗d7, preparing to castle queenside. With his actual choice, Shipov opts for an unconventional approach, although what follows is typical for this central pawn-structure.

12 ♕d2 *(D)*

B



12...♘xd4 13 ♕xd4 e5 14 ♕e3

Shipov's intended reaction to 14 ♕a4+ is interesting: 14...♔f8 15 0-0-0 ♗e6 16 f4 ♕c7, when 17 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 18 f5 ♗d7 19 ♕a3 ♗c6 is satisfactory for Black.

14...♗e6 15 0-0-0 ♕a5

Already 16...♖c8 is in the air and caution is needed. White therefore decides to simplify.

16 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 17 ♖xd6 ♖xh4 18 ♘d5 ♗xd5

There is no time for 18...♕xa2 due to the crushing 19 ♕c5!.

19 ♖xd5 ♕b4?!

This time there was no reason to avoid 19...♕xa2 20 ♕c5 a6. With the g1-rook hanging, White must be satisfied with 21 ♖xe5+ with a likely draw.

20 ♗d3

Somewhat better is 20 f3, keeping the d-file open for his rooks. The text-move allows simplifications.

20...♕b6 21 ♕xb6 axb6 22 a4 ♖d8 23 ♖b5

Or 23 ♗b5+ ♔e7 24 ♖gd1 ♖xd5 25 ♖xd5 ♖xe4 26 ♖d7+ ♔e6 27 ♖xb7 ♗d8 28 b3 ♖f4, etc.

23...♖d6 24 a5 ♖f4 25 ♖f1 ♔d7 26 f3

Or 26 axb6 ♔c6 27 ♖b3 ♔c5.

26...♔c7 27 ♔b1 bxa5 28 ♖xa5 g5 29 ♔a2 ♖d4 ½-½

We have just seen Kasparov and Shipov demonstrate how to neutralize a somewhat modified Keres Attack, in which White launches forward his g- and h-pawns. Towards the end of the 20th century another type of pawn attack was introduced into grandmaster practice, based on the early, sudden advance of the f- and g-pawns. It is worth analysing how Black copes with this new attempt on his life.

Shirov – Kasparov
Linares 1998
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 g4 h6 8 f4 e5

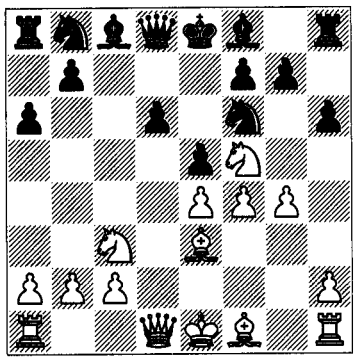
When 8...♕b6 became regarded as somewhat inappropriate in view of the reply 9 a3, and 8...b5 9 ♗g2 ♗b7 10 g5 was established to give White the initiative, Black decided he had to take stronger measures.

9 ♘f5 *(D)*

9...h5

9...♘c6 10 ♕f3 g6 allows the quite unpleasant 11 0-0-0. After 11...gxf5 12 exf5, as played in Anand-Kasparov, Dos Hermanas 1996, White has every reason to believe that his lasting pressure on the central files and the menacing kingside pawn-mass provide strong compensation.

B



At first glance 9...exf4 10 ♗xf4 ♘xe4? works owing to 11 ♘xe4 ♗xf5 12 gxf5 ♕h4+, but there is the simple 11 ♕e2, refuting the brazen idea.

Eventually Black resorted to the text-move, an unexpected counterblow on the same wing, which undermines the props supporting the dangerous knight at f5.

10 gxh5

We shall consider 10 g5 in the next game. Another interesting approach to the complexities of the position is 10 ♘d5, which lessens the pressure on the white pawns and accelerates queenside castling, but after 10...♘xd5 11 ♕xd5 g6 12 0-0-0 gxf5 13 exf5 ♘c6 14 ♗c4 ♕f6 Black was able to defend and make use of his extra material in the game Svidler-Topalov, Olympiad, Elista 1998.

10...exf4 11 ♗xf4 ♘xh5

Black manages to force events. In offering a pawn sacrifice, he counts on the fact that exchanges will tend to leave the white king less well protected.

12 ♘xd6+

12 ♗xd6? obviously loses after 12...♗xf5, but 12 ♗e3 comes into consideration. However, 12...g6 finally gets rid of the nuisance caused by the f5-knight, when 13 ♘d4 ♗h6 leads to simplifications.

12...♗xd6 13 ♗xd6

Forced because 13 ♕xd6? loses to 13...♕h4+, etc.

13...♕h4+ 14 ♔d2 ♕g5+

Black decides to play it safe. Kasparov gives 14...♖h6 15 ♗xb8, considering 15...♖xb8 16 ♕e1 favourable to White, who preserves an extra pawn (16...♘g3? fails to 17 ♕xg3 ♕xg3 18 hxg3 ♖xh1 19 ♗b5+). However, Black can instead choose 15...♕g5+ 16 ♔e1 ♖xb8 17 ♕d2 ♕h4+ 18 ♕f2 ♘g3 19 ♖g1 ♘xe4, with level play.

15 ♔e1 ♕h4+

On 15...♖h6 Kasparov gives 16 h4! (16 ♗xb8 transposes to the previous note) 16...♕e3+ 17 ♕e2 ♕b6 18 ♗a3 ♘g3 19 ♘d5 ♕c6 20 ♕g2 ♖g6 21 h5 as advantageous to White. 21...♖g4 appears to challenge this assessment, but 22 ♗e2 ♖xe4 23 ♕xg3 ♕xd5 24 ♖d1 does indeed favour White.

16 ♔d2 ♕g5+ 17 ♔e1 ♕h4+ ½-½

Leko – Shirov

Polanica Zdroj 1998

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 g4 h6 8 f4 e5 9 ♘f5 h5 10 g5

Considering White's desire to dominate on the central light squares, this is natural, but it weakens the support for the f5-knight.

10...♘xe4 11 ♘xe4

11 ♘xg7+ just releases Black's central pawns: 11...♗xg7 12 ♘xe4 d5 13 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 14 gxf6 d4 15 ♗f2 ♕d5 16 ♖g1 ♘c6 gives Black fine play.

11...♗xf5 12 ♗g2 ♘c6

12...exf4 is bad in view of 13 ♗xf4 d5 14 ♘c3 d4? 15 ♘d5, while 12...d5 is playable but disadvantageous: 13 ♘g3 exf4 14 ♘xf5 fxe3 15 ♕xd5 ♕xd5 16 ♗xd5 ♘c6 17 0-0-0. For instance: 17...g6 18 ♘xe3 ♗c5 19 ♘c4 or 17...0-0-0 18 ♗xf7 ♖xd1+ 19 ♖xd1 ♘d8 20 ♗g6.

13 0-0

At the end of the initial phase Black is a pawn up, but is behind in development and must therefore be cautious. White threatens 14 ♘xd6+ ♗xd6 15 fxe5.

13...♕d7

13...♗g4 gains a tempo, but after the quiet 14 ♕e1 it is not clear that Black has benefited at all.

14 fxe5 ♘xe5

14...dxe5 would open the file to White's advantage: after 15 ♕f3 ♗g4 16 ♕f2 the pressure on the d- and f-files is menacing (White threatens 17 h3).

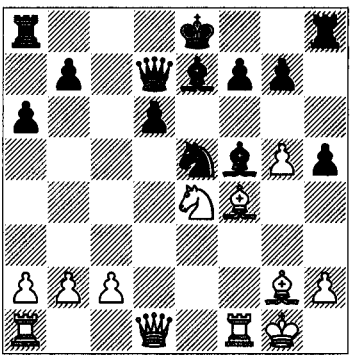
15 ♗f4 ♗e7 *(D)*

It is high time to castle, even though the queenside would be an insecure refuge.

16 ♘xd6+!

This only yields a draw, but Black has to find some accurate moves. Besides, it is not clear how to increase the pressure, so White's decision seems correct.

16...♗xd6



16...♕xd6 proves difficult after 17 ♕xd6 ♗xd6 18 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 19 ♖xf5 f6 (or 19...♗xb2 20 ♖e1+ ♔f8 21 ♗xb7, when 21...♖a7 is insufficient due to 22 ♖d5 g6 23 ♖d7) 20 gxf6 ♗xf6 21 ♗xb7 ♖b8 22 ♗xa6 ♖xb2 23 ♗d3, etc.

17 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 18 ♕xd7+ ♔xd7

The saving move. After 18...♗xd7 19 ♖ae1 0-0-0? (19...0-0 20 ♖xe5 ♗c6 21 ♗xc6 bxc6 is obviously a better try) 20 ♖xe5 ♗e6 21 g6 Black loses material.

19 ♖xf5 f6 20 ♗xb7 ♖a7

If 20...♖ab8, then 21 ♗xa6 ♖xb2 22 ♗d3.

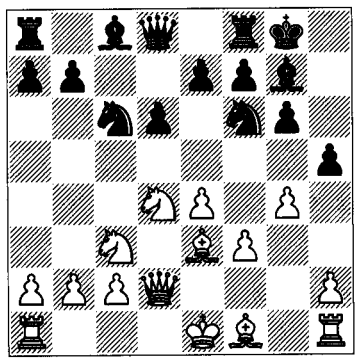
21 ♗d5 ♗xb2 22 ♖d1 ♗e5 23 gxf6 gxf6 24 ♖xh5 ♖xh5 25 ♗f7+ ♔c6 26 ♗xh5 ½-½

By advancing the h-pawn, Black neutralized his opponent's aggressive intentions. The idea is relatively recent, but has been familiar for several years in similar positions in some other Sicilian systems. As a matter of fact, it was in the Dragon that Black started to oppose White's pawn attack on the kingside by advancing his h-pawn.

The following game is an illustrative example in a modern interpretation...

Barcelak – Golubev
Münster 1996
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 g6 6 ♗e3 ♗g7 7 f3 0-0 8 ♕d2 ♘c6 9 g4 h5 *(D)*



We earlier encountered this response in reply to h4, but Golubev adopts it in a significantly different situation. It is based on a series of tactical solutions made possible by his quick and sound basic development.

10 h3

10 g5 ♘h7 11 f4 would be answered by 11...♘xd4 12 ♗xd4 e5. Therefore White decides to keep the tension, planning further developing moves before taking action, but Black won't have any of that.

10...d5

Audacious indeed! This time the reaction in the centre comes in combination with wing counterplay. First we find out that 11 g5, which at first glance looks like a simple refutation, can be parried by 11...♘h7 12 ♘xd5 (if 12 exd5 there is 12...♘b4 13 ♗c4 e6) 12...e6 (12...♗xd4? 13 ♗xd4 ♘xg5 14 ♕xg5 ♘xd4 15 0-0-0 is no good at all for Black) 13 ♘xc6 bxc6 14 ♘c3 ♕a5. Similarly, 11 gxh5 ♘xh5 12 exd5 is met by 12...♘b4 13 ♗c4 e6.

The alternative to 11 g5 is 11 ♘xc6 bxc6 12 e5 (after 12 0-0-0 e5 13 ♗c5 the exchange sacrifice by 13...d4 14 ♗xf8 ♕xf8 is in my opinion sound) 12...♘d7 13 f4, when 13...h4 was played in Kovchan-Golubev, Ukrainian Ch 1997. Then 14 0-0-0 ♕a5 (14...g5, suggested by Golubev, looks too pretentious in view of 15 ♗d3) 15 ♕e1 ♖e8 16 ♕xh4 ♖b8 brought White a material advantage, but at the cost of time which Black used to create counterplay on the queenside.

Considering all this, White probably looked for safety and returned to the first choice.

11 g5 ♘h7 12 0-0-0 ♗xd4 13 ♗xd4 dxe4 14 ♘xe4 ♘xd4 15 ♕xd4 ♕c7

15...♕xd4 16 ♖xd4 ♗f5 is good enough, but Black is ambitious and with good reason.

16 ♗c4?

White wishes to strengthen his king's defences by transferring the light-squared bishop to b3, as is often done in the Dragon. Unfortunately, Black now catches him on the wrong foot. 16 ♕e3 was correct.

16...♗f5

White had assessed that 16...♕f4+ 17 ♔b1 ♕xf3 (or 17...♘xg5 18 ♖hg1) 18 ♖df1 would hardly come into

consideration for Black. However, after the text-move, Black threatens 17...♕f4+ followed by 18...♕xf3 owing to the hanging white knight on e4. Therefore, White has no time to carry out the planned bishop transfer.

17 ♔b1 ♖ad8 18 ♕c3 ♖c8 19 ♗b3 ♕xc3 20 ♘xc3 ♘xg5

The price has been paid.

21 ♘d5 ♖fe8 22 ♗a4 b5 23 ♘e3 bxa4 24 ♘xf5 ♘xf3 25 ♖hf1 ♘e5 26 ♖de1 ♘c4 27 ♘xe7+ ♖xe7 0-1

In Golubev's plan the sudden advance of the h-pawn blocked the attack on his king at no cost. Quite often though, players are willing to sacrifice a rook's pawn to gain time to create counterplay on the other wing. We find such sacrifices in various openings. The following instructive game will remind the reader of a variation popular a quarter of a century ago, typical of the problem we are discussing.

Bellon – Adorjan
Olympiad, Buenos Aires 1978
Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♘f6 5 ♘xf6+ gxf6

Black accepts lasting damage to his pawn-structure in the hope of using the semi-open g-file to his advantage. The position is quite sensitive and it took White a long time to find the right path.

6 c3

In a way this is a waiting move, but a useful one which restricts Black's options. Moreover, it reinforces the d4-pawn and makes ♕b3 possible, which proves useful in several lines.

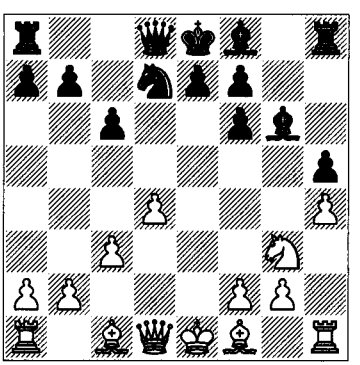
6...♗f5

6...♕d5, for instance, would be met by 7 ♕b3, when 7...♕xb3 8 axb3 opens the a-file to White's advantage. Also, after 6...e5 there is 7 ♗c4 exd4 8 ♕b3 ♕e7+ 9 ♘e2, an old idea of Nimzowitsch's which gives White plenty of compensation.

7 ♘e2 ♘d7

7...e5 is inappropriate. After 8 ♘g3 ♗e6 9 ♗e3 ♕c7 10 ♗d3 White controls the f5-square and is superior. No praise can be given to 7...h5, a move popular in the 1950s and 1960s, since 8 ♘g3 ♗g4 9 f3 ♗e6 (9...h4?! is dubious in view of 10 fxg4 hxg3 11 h4) 10 ♗f4 ♕a5 11 ♗d3 h4 12 ♘e4 ♘d7 13 0-0 proves advantageous to White.

8 ♘g3 ♗g6 9 h4 h5 *(D)*



This pawn cannot be defended, but it will cost White several tempi to capture it. Meanwhile, it temporarily blocks the expanding white pawn, and Black intends to use this respite to create counterplay on the queenside.

10 ♗e2 ♕a5 11 b4

In Stefansson-P.Johansson, Gausdal 1992, White successfully played the preparatory 11 a3.

11...♕c7 12 ♘xh5 a5

For years Black based his counterplay on this move. White is a pawn up, but he needs time to stabilize the situation. His king is still uncastled, and if he is to castle kingside then he will need to spend additional time defending the h4-pawn. Apart from that, after 13...axb4 White's queenside pawns will be under pressure.

13 ♘f4 axb4 14 ♘xg6 fxg6 15 cxb4

15 ♕d3 proved strong in Liberzon-Pasman, Beersheba 1984. In those days it was an important novelty. White is ready to trade his b-pawn for the g6-pawn. Then 15...bxc3 16 ♕xg6+ ♔d8 17 g3 e6 18 0-0 ♗a3 19 ♗c4 ♖e8 20 ♖e1 ♕d6 21 ♗f4 was advantageous to White.

15...e5 16 b5?!

This light-hearted move presents Black with counterplay. 16 ♖b1 is critical, given that 16...♖xa2 does not work due to 17 ♕b3 followed by 18 ♕g3. After 16...0-0-0 there is the strong 17 ♕d3, when after 17...exd4 18 ♕xd4 ♘e5 19 ♕c3 White stands better. I tried to improve on that by 17...♕d6, when 18 ♗e3 ♗h6 or 18 dxe5 ♕xd3 19 ♗xd3 ♘xe5 20 ♗e2 ♖d4 offers Black compensation, but 18 b5 is quite unpleasant. 18...c5 fails to 19 dxc5 and 18...♘c5 to 19 ♕xg6 exd4 20 ♕f5+. Since 17...f5 18 ♗g5 ♖e8 19 d5 cannot satisfy Black either, he would face difficulties.

16...♗b4+ 17 ♗d2 ♕d6

All of a sudden Black has a good deal of pressure in compensation for the pawn, and this provokes the following simplifications.

18 bxc6 bxc6 19 dxe5 ♘xe5 20 ♗xb4

White has no choice in view of the threatened 20...♖d8.

20...♕xb4+ 21 ♕d2 ♖xh4 22 ♕xb4 ♖xh1+ 23 ♔d2 ♖xa1 24 ♗c4 ♘xc4+ 25 ♕xc4 ♖8xa2+ 26 ♔e3 ♖e1+ 27 ♔f3 ½-½

On the queenside, the a-pawn has a less dramatic but very important role in a number of positions arising in the Slav and Semi-Slav. The a-pawn's task is to undermine the compact mass of black pawns created in the opening.

Dizdar – Pavasović
Pula 1996
Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 e6 4 ♘c3 ♘f6 5 ♗g5 dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 a4 *(D)*

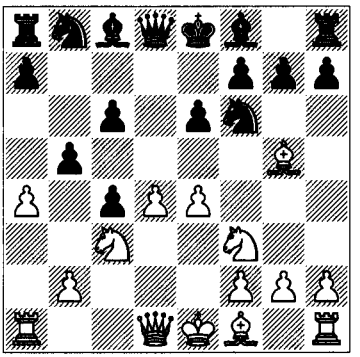
Apart from the main line of the 'Anti-Meran' introduced by 7 e5, White has quite often chosen this lateral blow designed to undermine and destabilize Black's rampart on the queenside.

7...♗b7

In case of 7...b4 8 ♘b1 the pawn at c4 is lost and material balance established. After 8...♗a6 9 ♕c1 c3 10 bxc3 ♗xf1 11 ♔xf1 ♘bd7 12 ♘bd2 c5 13 d5 White's position is preferable.

The text-move is the modern method of defence: Black leaves the b5-pawn

B



en prise and consequently gives up the c4-pawn as well, but he is satisfied to eliminate the e4-pawn and claim his share of the centre. In former periods, however, Black was reluctant to weaken his mass of pawns and fortified it by 7...♕b6 8 ♗xf6 gxf6, jealously keeping his material advantage. From this point play continued 9 ♗e2, and then:

a) 9...a6 10 0-0 ♗b7. Now in the famous game Tal-Keller, Zurich 1959 White struck by 11 d5 cxd5 12 exd5, and after 12...b4 13 a5 ♕c7 14 dxe6 bxc3 15 ♘d4! he had a tremendous attack. Note that the central thrust was prepared by the modest a-pawn, which, depending on the reply, opens the a-file or, by attacking the queen, vacates the a4-square for his own queen. Given this harsh lesson, Black tried to improve with 12...♘d7 but again faced difficulties after 13 axb5 axb5 14 ♖xa8+ ♗xa8 15 b3 (finally demolishing the black pawn-wall) 15...♗b4 16 ♘a2 ♗d6 17 bxc4 b4 18 ♘c1 with the obvious intention of blockading the passed pawn by 19 ♘b3.

b) Black sought improvements and came up with 9...♗b7 10 0-0 ♗b4, ready to meet 11 d5 with 11...cxd5 12 exd5 ♗xc3 13 bxc3 ♗xd5. In my opinion White should continue 11 axb5 cxb5 12 d5, with 13 ♘d4 in mind. In all these attempts to seize the initiative, the a-pawn plays a crucial role.

8 axb5 cxb5 9 ♘xb5 ♗b4+

After 9...♕b6 10 ♕a4 Black played 10...♘bd7 in Dizdar-Šulava, Croatian Ch, Slavonski Brod 1995, but it ended in disaster: 11 ♗xc4 a6 12 ♘c3 ♕xb2 13 0-0!. A couple of rounds later Šulava tried to improve against Hulak with 10...♘c6, but after 11 ♘c3 ♕xb2 12 ♗d2 ♕b3 13 ♗xc4 ♕xa4 14 ♖xa4 he had only achieved a bad endgame. The immediate 9...♗xe4 looks more realistic.

10 ♘c3 ♗xe4 11 ♕a4+!?

In Hulak-Piket, Wijk aan Zee 1995, 11 ♗xc4 ♘c6 12 0-0 led to a tactical skirmish in which after 12...♗xf3 13 ♕xf3 ♘xd4 14 ♕e3 ♘c2 15 ♗b5+ ♔f8 16 ♗xf6 ♘xe3 17 ♗xd8 ♘xf1 White had to fight for his life.

It is somewhat surprising that the logical text-move was not considered earlier.

11...♘c6 12 ♘e5 ♕b6?

In choosing this apparently natural move, Black neglects some tactical details. The more modest 12...♖c8 appears indispensable.

13 ♘xc4!

13 ♗xc4 is well met by 13...0-0, when 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♘d7 ♕xd4 obviously does not work. Note that the greedy 13...♗xg2? loses to 14 ♖g1 ♗e4 15 d5.

13...♕xd4

13...♕c7 is strongly answered by 14 ♘d2.

14 ♖d1 ♗xc3+ 15 bxc3 ♕xc3+ 16 ♗d2 ♕c2 17 ♕a3!

This quiet move accentuates Black's difficulties: his queen is stranded in enemy territory, and his king remains exposed.

17...♖b8

This move parries the threat of 18 ♖c1, which would now be countered by 18...♖b1, but that is not enough to save Black.

On 17...♖d8 White wins by 18 ♖c1 ♘d4 19 ♘d6+. A better practical chance was 17...♗d5 18 ♗d3 ♘d4 19 ♘d6+ ♔d7. Dizdar concluded that after 20 ♘b5! ♘xb5 21 ♗xb5+ ♗c6 22 ♗e3+ ♘d5 23 ♖c1 Black has no compensation, while 20 ♘xf7 ♕b3 21 ♕c5 (but not 21 ♕d6+ ♔e8 22 ♕c7 e5) is also good for White.

18 ♘d6+ ♔d7 19 ♘b5

Threatening ♕d6+ as well as ♖c1. The knight manoeuvre eventually wins material.

19...♖xb5 20 ♗xb5 ♗xg2 21 ♗f4+

Nicer was 21 ♕xa7+ ♔e8 22 ♕b8+ ♔d7 (or 22...♔e7 23 ♗b4+, etc.) 23 ♕xh8 ♗xh1 24 ♗a5+.

21...♔e8 22 ♕d6 ♗d5

If 22...♕c3+ then 23 ♗d2 ♕f3 24 ♕b8+ forces mate.

23 ♖xd5 ♕e4+ 24 ♗e3 ♕xh1+ 25 ♔e2 ♕xd5 26 ♗xc6+ ♘d7 27 ♗xd5 exd5 28 ♕xd5 1-0

The h-file has become a frequent highway for white and black armies charging up and down, but in recent years we have also seen Black opposing the pawn advance on the g-file. We have already encountered a couple of examples in our analysis, but I feel we should devote some more time to this defensive measure.

Leko – Topalov
Linares 1999
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 f3 b5 8 g4 h6 9 ♕d2 ♘bd7 10 0-0-0 ♗b7 11 h4 b4 12 ♘b1 d5 13 ♗h3 g5

We came across this same position in the game Anand-Kasparov, played in the same tournament some rounds later. Facing the threat of 14 g5, which would cause disorder amongst Black's pieces and expose his position to attack, Black pits his g-pawn against it, obstructing its further advance. The move obviously involves a pawn sacrifice, a price Black is ready to pay to catch his breath and undertake offensive steps on the other wing.

14 hxg5 hxg5 15 exd5

In case of 15 ♗xg5 dxe4 16 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 17 g5 Black can calmly answer 17...♕d6.

15...♘xd5 16 ♗xg5 ♕a5

The sacrifice has paid off: White's initiative has lost its steam and Black threatens to take over. The a2-pawn cannot be defended in any satisfactory way (17 a3 just weakens the queenside and is answered by 17...♕b6) and it will take several tempi to organize any meaningful play against the black king.

17 ♗g2 ♖xh1 18 ♖xh1 ♕xa2 19 ♖h8

The rook on h8 looks menacing, but the transfer cost tempi and it is questionable whether it was worth it. Perhaps 19 f4 should be considered.

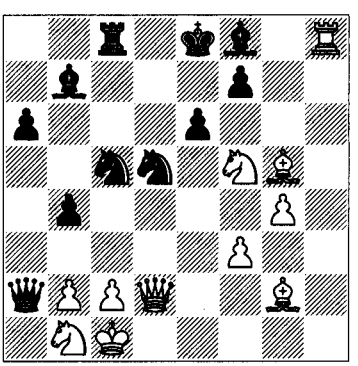
19...♖c8?!

After 19...♘7b6 (again threatening 20...♘c4) White plays 20 ♘b3, when 20...♘c4? loses to 21 ♕d4 (threatening ♖xf8+ and mate next move), while 20...♖c8 is also met by 21 ♕d4.

Seeing the game for the first time I was attracted by 19...♘e5, ready to jump to c4 or g6. Then 20 ♗h6 obviously fails to 20...0-0-0, 20 ♘b3 to 20...♖c8 and 20 b3 loses to 20...♕a1. Also, 20 ♗f1 ♖c8 looks pleasant for Black. Later I discovered that Leko had in mind drastic measures: 20 ♘xe6 fxe6 21 ♕d4 ♘f7 22 ♕g7 ♘xh8 23 ♕xb7 leading to a draw.

Whatever the case, 19...♖c8 seems to me inferior.

20 ♘f5 ♘c5! *(D)*



A fine tactical solution at what looked a critical moment.

21 ♖xf8+

Leko chooses the best option. 21 ♘d6+ ♔d7 22 ♘xc8 is answered by 22...♗g7 23 ♘b6+ ♔c6 24 ♘xd5 ♕xb2+ 25 ♔d1 ♕xb1+ 26 ♔e2 ♗xh8 27 ♘xb4+ ♔b5, leading to a favourable queen and minor-piece endgame.

21...♔xf8 22 ♗h6+ ♔e8 23 ♘d6+ ♔d7?!

White should play 23...♔d8 intending to meet 24 ♘xc8 by 24...♕c4 (Leko) – quite a difference! If White continues 24 ♗g5+ there is 24...♔c7 (24...f6 loses to 25 ♗xf6+ ♘xf6 26 ♘xb7+, etc.) 25 ♘xc8 ♕c4 with a fine game for Black. After the text-move, the queen cannot improve its position so efficiently.

24 ♘xc8 ♔xc8 25 ♕d4 ♕a5 26 ♗f8 ♘d7 27 ♗d6

Black is weak on the dark squares and can expect some difficulties in the ending.

27...♗c6 28 ♗f1 ♔b7 29 ♘d2 ♕a1+ 30 ♘b1 ♕a5 31 ♗d3 ♕d8?

The endgame after 31...♕b6 is pleasant for White, but due to the reduced material it was a better option for Black, who was probably relying on his opponent's time-trouble.

32 ♘d2

Note that 32 ♗xb4 fails to 32...e5.

32...e5

On 32...♕g5 or 32...♕h4 White would continue 33 ♔b1.

33 ♕c4

Now, of course, 33 ♗xe5 would lose to 33...♕h4.

33...♕b6 34 ♔b1 a5 35 ♘e4?

White returns the favour. The correct 35 ♘b3 leaves the e4-square

vacant for the bishop and so 35...♘f4 would then lose to 36 ♗e4. On other tries, 36 ♘c5+ fatally weakens Black's defence by exchanging a pair of knights.

35...♘f4 36 ♘c5+

36 ♗c5 still keeps an advantage.

36...♘xc5 37 ♗xc5 ♗d5 38 ♗xb6

If 38 ♗e4 then 38...♕c6.

38...♗xc4 39 ♗xc4 ♔xb6 40 ♗xf7 ♘h3

The point: White cannot penetrate Black's camp.

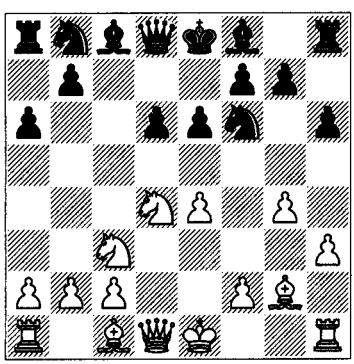
41 c3 bxc3 42 bxc3 ♘g5 43 ♗d5 ♔c5 44 ♗b7 ♔d6 45 ♔b2 ♘e6! 46 ♗e4 ♘c5 47 g5 ♔e7 48 ♔a3 ♘e6 49 g6 ♘c5 50 ♗d5 ♔f6 51 ♗f7 ♔g7 52 ♔b2 ♔f6 53 ♔c2 ♔g7 ½-½

Adams – I. Sokolov

Sarajevo 1999

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 h3 a6 8 ♗g2 *(D)*



B

8...g5

In the Keres Attack, the advance of White's g-pawn is usually followed by further aggressive steps on the kingside. We have analysed several games on this subject and we saw that often Black was able to achieve good counterplay in the centre. This time the early fianchetto prevents counterplay in the centre and postpones a pawn advance on the kingside. However, Black's last move demonstrates that he is ready to obstruct White's designs at once. As a matter of fact, the idea is not new. Hübner-Andersson, Johannesburg 1981 reached this position via a somewhat different move-order, and continued 8...♘c6 9 ♘de2 (White retreats since 9 0-0 ♘xd4 10 ♕xd4 e5 11 ♕d3 ♗e7 12 f4 exf4 13 ♗xf4 ♗e6 gives Black a typically firm position) 9...g5 10 f4 gxf4 11 ♗xf4 ♘e5 12 ♕d4 ♕c7 13 0-0-0 b5 14 ♔b1 ♗b7 with good play.

9 ♗e3 ♘bd7

In Z.Almasi-Shirov, European Clubs Cup, Senec 1998, Black chose the riskier line 9...♘c6 10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 e5 ♘d5 12 ♗d4 dxe5 13 ♗xe5 f6 14 ♘xd5 exd5 15 ♗c3 ♕e7+ 16 ♔f1 ♗g7 and stood well.

10 ♕e2 ♘e5 11 0-0-0 ♗d7

A cautious approach. 11...♕c7 can be met by 12 h4; as long as the queen is on d8 that does not work.

12 ♘f3

12 h4 obviously fails to 12...♘fxg4 13 hxg5 ♘xe3 14 ♕xe3 ♘c4, etc. 12 f4 gxf4 13 ♗xf4 ♖c8 is not pleasant for White either. We should note the strength of the black central pawn-formation with two pawns on their

third rank and the pawn outpost at g5, frustrating White's attempts to seize the initiative on the kingside.

12...♕a5

12...b5 comes into consideration.

13 ♔b1 ♗e7 14 ♘xe5

14 h4 again does not work due to 14...♘fxg4 15 hxg5 ♘xe3 16 ♕xe3 ♘xf3 followed by 17...♗xg5.

14...dxe5 15 h4 ♖g8

15...gxh4 16 ♖xh4 ♘xe4 loses to 17 ♘xe4 ♗xh4 18 ♘d6+ ♔e7 19 ♘xb7, etc.

16 hxg5 hxg5 17 ♖h6 ♗c6 18 ♕f3 ♘d7 19 ♖h7 ♘f6 20 ♖h6 ♘d7 21 ♗f1

Objectively, repeating the position was White's best option.

21...♖d8?!

Black opts for an imprecise move-order. If he continues with the natural 21...♘f8, planning 22...♘g6 followed by 23...♖d8, it becomes clear that White should have taken the draw.

22 ♗c4 ♘f8 23 ♘d5!

This probably came as a surprise for Black. As a matter of fact, the move is in my opinion necessary – a mild treatment would lead to the gradual deterioration of White's position.

23...exd5 24 exd5 ♕b4?

Black had to play 24...♗b5 25 ♗b6 ♕b4 26 ♗xb5+ ♕xb5 27 ♗xd8 ♗xd8, when his position is passive but the passed pawn will be blocked by ...♘d7 and all White's entry points are protected.

25 dxc6 ♖xd1+ 26 ♕xd1 ♕xc4 27 b3!

Decisive: the queen must leave its good place.

27...♕b4

27...♕e4 loses to 28 c7, 27...♕b5 to 28 c4, 27...♕c3 to 28 cxb7 ♕c7 29 ♕d5 ♘d7 30 ♗a7, etc.

28 a3 ♕a5 29 cxb7 ♘d7 30 ♖c6 ♗d8 31 ♖c8 ♔e7 32 ♗c5+ 1-0

The battle was lost in the middlegame, but Black's opening strategy stood the test.

In both games the advance of the black g-pawn was a defensive measure taken to neutralize White's aggression. Sometimes the steps taken by Black on the g-file look more aggressive, although their nature remains defensive. There is a specific case which we should consider...

Adams – Kožul

World Team Ch, Lucerne 1997
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 ♕d2 a6 8 0-0-0

This is one of the main lines of the Richter-Rauzer Attack. By developing his dark-squared bishop to g5, White discourages any enemy activity in the centre for a while. He also prepares to castle queenside and play f4.

8...♗d7 9 f4 h6

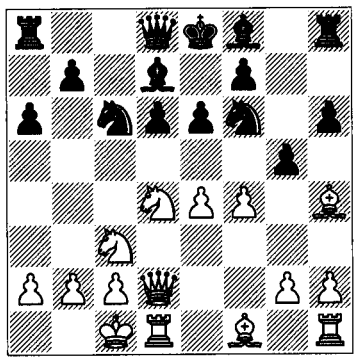
Black often prefers queenside action by 9...b5, but the text-move is another energetic reply and one of Kožul's favourites.

10 ♗h4 g5 *(D)*

10...♘xe4 wins a pawn, but after 11 ♕e1 ♘f6 12 ♘f5 the initiative passes to White. The text-move, on the contrary, temporarily offers a pawn in

order to eliminate the f4-pawn and ensure command of the important central square e5.

W



11 fxg5 ♘g4 12 ♗e2

Note that after 12 ♘f3 hxg5, 13 ♗xg5 does not work due to 13...f6, while 13 ♗g3 transposes to the main line. Anyway, some simple tactics based on pins will shortly restore the material balance.

12...♘ge5 13 ♘f3 ♗e7 14 ♔b1

14 ♖hg1 indirectly defends the g5-pawn, but the pin remains and Black would calmly continue 14...b5. The same goes for 14 ♖dg1.

14...hxg5 15 ♗g3 ♘xf3

The alternative is 15...b5 16 ♖df1 (to exert pressure on the semi-open file and the f7-pawn) 16...♖c8 17 ♘xe5 (17 ♘d1 looks slow and does not impress; e.g., 17...♘xf3 18 ♖xf3 ♘e5 19 ♖f2 ♗c6 20 ♕d4 ♕c7, Becerra-Dominguez, Havana 1997) 17...♘xe5 18 ♖f2 f6 19 ♖hf1 ♗c6 20 a3 ♗b7 with good play for Black, Short-Kasparov, PCA World Ch match (game 2), London 1993.

16 gxf3 ♘e5 17 f4 gxf4 18 ♗xf4 ♕c7 19 h4

The point of White's 17th move: he obtains a passed pawn.

19...b5

Note that 19...♖xh4 is not advisable due to 20 ♗g5 ♖xh1 21 ♖xh1.

20 a3 ♖b8 21 h5 a5

21...b4 also came into consideration. In any case, Black manages to create counterplay and to gain compensation for White's passed h-pawn.

22 ♘a2 b4 23 axb4 axb4 24 ♖h3 ♕c5

24...♕a5 does not cause White any worries on the open file because of 25 ♖a3, which is liable to transpose to the game.

25 ♖b3 ♘c6 26 c3

26 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 27 ♕xd6 ♗xd6 28 ♖xd6 ♔e7 29 ♖bd3 (or 29 ♖d1 e5) 29...♘e5 30 ♖d1 ♗c6 would please Black.

26...bxc3 27 ♖xb8+ ♘xb8 28 ♘xc3 ♗c6 29 ♗e3

A poor decision. In my opinion White should take the d6-pawn now.

29...♕b4 30 ♕d3 ♘d7 31 ♗d4 ♗f6

Although in severe time-trouble, Kožul plays sound chess.

32 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 33 ♗f3

33 e5 is parried by 33...♘d5 and 33 ♕xd6 ♕xd6 34 ♖xd6 ♗xe4+ 35 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 36 ♖a6 ♔e7 promises White little.

33...♘d7 34 ♕xd6 ♕xd6 35 ♖xd6 ♘e5 36 ♗e2 ♔e7 37 ♖d1 ♘d7 38 ♔c2 ♘f6

While watching the game I also considered 38...♘c5 39 ♖d4 f5 40

exf5 exf5, with welcome simplification.

39 ♗f3 ♖g8?!

One would expect 39...♘d7, threatening 40...f5, but Kožul was down to his last seconds.

40 e5 ♗xf3?

Once more Black errs. 40...♘d5 is correct, when after 41 ♘xd5+ ♗xd5 42 ♗xd5 exd5 43 ♖xd5, Black should play 43...♖h8. Note that 43...♔e6? loses to 44 ♖c5:

a) 44...♖h8 45 h6 ♔f5 46 b4 ♖xh6 47 e6+ ♔f6 48 exf7 ♔xf7 49 ♔b3 ♔e7 50 ♖d5 and the king is cut off, and White wins.

b) 44...♖g2+ 45 ♔c3 ♖h2 is no improvement because White again has 46 h6.

41 exf6+ ♔e8 42 ♖d6!

The key to victory which Kožul missed: White threatens 43 ♘b5 and this is decisive.

42...♖g2+ 43 ♔b3 ♖g3 44 ♔a2 ♖g2 45 h6 ♗e2 46 h7 1-0

White achieved a hard-fought victory, but the early 10...g5, in spite of some shortcomings, remains an active option for Black.

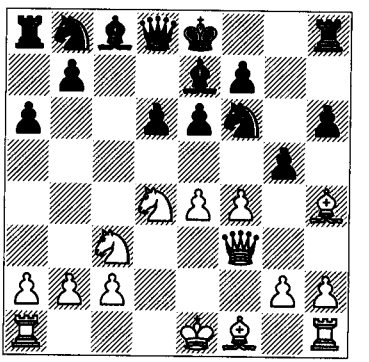
There are also lines of the Najdorf in which Black boldly advances his g-pawn in similar circumstances and with similar intentions. One of the most notorious is named the Gothenburg Variation, after the city where it was introduced in remarkable circumstances. Let us cast our minds back to a day in 1955, when by the luck of the draw three Soviet grandmasters were to meet three Argentineans in the same round of the Interzonal tournament.

Keres – Najdorf
Interzonal tournament, Gothenburg 1955
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♗e7 8 ♕f3

White prepares to castle queenside, and is ready for action in the centre or on the kingside.

8...h6 9 ♗h4 g5 *(D)*



Black's pre-emptive strike relies on the pin on the d8-h4 diagonal and he hopes to obtain a commanding post for his knight at e5. However, an important point counts against Black: in comparison to the previous game, in which Adams's queen was placed at d2 with limited options, this time the white queen is positioned much more aggressively.

10 fxg5 ♘fd7 11 ♘xe6!

One of the great curiosities of chess history is that on the same day the games Geller-Panno and Spassky-Pilnik were also played and this very

position appeared in all three games. At first glance White's chances do not appear promising. There is the open f-file, the chance to check from h5, but the prospect of black knights taking up positions on e5 and c6 seems to cast doubt on the sacrificial idea. The Soviet players took a risk, as the consequences of their bold sacrifice could hardly be worked out to a finish at the board.

Years later, the Bulgarian grandmaster Radulov saw the position in a less dramatic manner and analysed 11 ♕h5 ♘e5 12 ♗g3 ♗xg5 13 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ 14 ♕xf3 ♘c6 15 h4, relying on White's pressure on the d- and f-files.

11...fxe6 12 ♕h5+ ♔f8 13 ♗b5!

This is the crucial move, and Keres was the first of the three to play it. The point is shown by the continuation of Geller-Panno: after 13...♘e5 14 ♗g3, 14...♘bc6 does not succeed in supporting the vital defensive post at e5.

13...♔g7

13...♕e8 obviously loses to 14 0-0+ ♔g7 15 gxh6+.

The continuation demonstrates that control of the f7-square is vital and the sharp mind of Robert Fischer produced the critical 13...♖h7 against Gligorić in the following Interzonal tournament, played in Portorož in 1958. After 14 ♕g6 ♖f7 15 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 16 ♕g6+ ♖g7 17 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 Black was safe. Improvements were searched for in 14 0-0+ ♔g8 15 g6 ♖g7 16 ♖f7 ♗xh4 17 ♕xh6 but after 17...♖xf7 18 gxf7+ ♔xf7 White was considered to have no more than a draw. Recently, Dale Kirton in detailed analysis published in *ChessBase Magazine 79*, claimed a win by 19 ♖f1+ ♗f6 20 ♕h7+ ♔f8 21 e5 dxe5 22 ♗e2. Against Mikhalchishin's 17...♕f6, Kirton's refutation starts with 18 ♖xf6 ♗xf6 19 e5.

Inspired by Fischer's idea, my clubmate Minić tried 13...♘e5 14 ♗g3 (note that 14 0-0+ ♔g8 15 ♗g3 fails to 15...hxg5) 14...♖h7 in the 1960s. Unfortunately, in his game against Blatny, Yugoslavia 1966, he suffered a disaster after 15 ♗xe5 dxe5 16 ♖d1 ♗d7 17 g6 ♖g7 18 0-0+ ♔g8 19 ♗c4 ♕c8 20 ♗b3 ♗e8 21 ♘d5, with a strong attack.

14 0-0 ♘e5

Keres also analysed 14...♕g8 15 g6! ♗xh4 16 ♕xh4! ♕d8 17 ♖f7+ ♔xg6 18 ♖e7!.

15 ♗g3 ♘g6

Najdorf, whose queenside forces remain cut off owing to the mighty b5-bishop, finds the best defence. In case of 15...♕g8 I can only cite Keres: 16 ♗xe5+ dxe5 17 ♗e8! ♕xe8 18 gxh6+ winning.

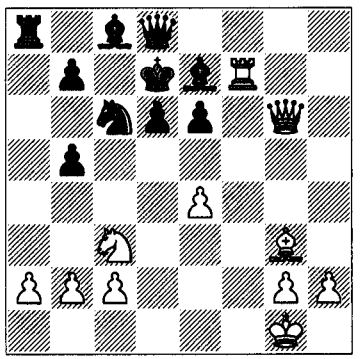
16 gxh6+ ♖xh6 17 ♖f7+ ♔xf7 18 ♕xh6 axb5

I quote Paul Keres again: "Other defensive measures are no better. On 18...♕h8, the beautiful variation 19 ♖f1+ ♗f6 20 ♗e8+! ♔xe8 21 ♕xg6+ ♔e7 22 ♖xf6!, etc., decides."

19 ♖f1+ ♔e8 20 ♕xg6+ ♔d7 21 ♖f7 ♘c6 *(D)*

Black has attempted to evacuate his king to the queenside while preserving a material advantage. However, all Black's pieces are awkwardly placed,

pinned and without prospects. Thus, 21...b4 22 ♘d5 exd5 23 exd5 ♖xa2 loses to 24 ♕xd6+ ♔e8 25 ♕g6, while 21...♔c6 fails to 22 ♕h7 ♗g5 23 e5 ♗e3+ 24 ♔h1 d5 25 ♕d3 ♕b6 26 ♘xd5.



22 ♘d5! ♖xa2

If 22...exd5 then 23 ♕xd6+ ♔e8 24 ♕g6 and there is no way to parry the numerous threats. For instance: 24...♕b6+ 25 ♗f2 d4 26 ♖g7+ ♔d7 27 ♕f5+.

23 h4

It is curious that the game Spassky-Pilnik had followed exactly the same course up until now. Spassky chose 23 h3.

23...♕h8 24 ♘xe7 ♘xe7 25 ♕g5 1-0

25...♖a1+ 26 ♔h2 ♕d8 27 ♕xb5+ ♔c7 28 ♕c5+ is simple.

There are also examples in which Black opposes White's advance on the queenside, obstructing the b-pawn in the same manner, but they are rarer as it is less common for White to use his b-pawn to seize space or the initiative when there is a dynamic centre. Also, such a step may involve a weakening of the pawn, which is liable to come under strong pressure on b5. A couple of instructive games occur to me.

Boleslavsky – Bronstein
Candidates match (game 8), Moscow 1950
Ruy Lopez (Spanish)

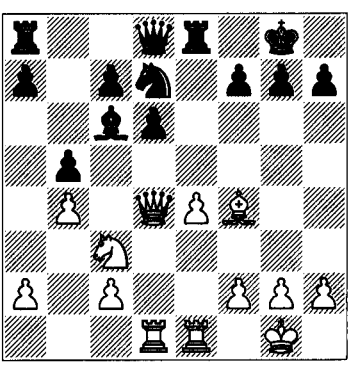
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♘f6 4 0-0 d6 5 d4 ♗d7 6 ♘c3 ♗e7 7 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 8 ♕d3

A standard procedure in this old variation: having given up the bishop-pair, White compels his opponent either to choose the cumbersome 8...♘d7 or to give ground in the centre.

8...exd4 9 ♘xd4 0-0 10 ♗f4 ♘d7 11 ♖ad1 ♗f6 12 b4

In harmony with the plan started by 8 ♕d3, White advances the pawn to control the c5-square, to squeeze Black and emphasize his spatial advantage.

12...♖e8 13 ♖fe1 ♗xd4 14 ♕xd4 b5 *(D)*



Seeking meaningful counterplay, Black trades off his dark-squared bishop for the centralized knight and takes his share of space on the queenside – a correct decision in the circumstances.

15 ♖d3

This good move has various purposes: to attack the black king, if the opportunity arises, to win the central file if it opens, or to exert pressure on the queenside from c3 or a3.

15...♕f6

Prompted by White's last move, Black decides to exchange queens, getting rid of the potential menace to his king. He believes that he will now be able to open the a-file to his advantage. However, subsequent events do not support his decision.

16 ♕xf6 ♘xf6 17 f3 a5?!

From now on the b5-pawn will be more vulnerable. 17...♘d7 seems the most appropriate.

18 a3 axb4 19 axb4 ♘d7 20 ♘d5

Simple and strong: it is unpleasant for Black to put up with this dominant knight, but the alternative of eliminating it is even less appealing.

20...♖a7

20...♗xd5 21 ♖xd5 ♖eb8 (21...♖ab8 22 ♖a1 cedes the open file to White) 22 e5 ♘xe5 23 ♗xe5 dxe5 24 ♖exe5 c6 25 ♖d6 favours White.

21 ♖ed1

White is ready to play 22 ♖c3; the pressure grows.

21...♘e5 22 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 23 ♘e3 ♗d7

As is normally the case, the pawn-structure determines the strengths and shortcomings of the minor pieces. In our case Black's passive pawn-formation on the queenside limits the activity of his light-squared bishop to a defensive role. Therefore Black tries to increase its range by moving it to e6.

24 ♖c3 ♗e6 25 ♖d4 g5 26 g3?!

It was the proper moment for 26 ♖dd3, when White would be able to seize the open file at will. The text-move inadvertently offers Black counterplay.

26...♔f8 27 ♔f2 f6 28 ♖dd3 g4 29 ♖a3 ♖xa3 30 ♖xa3 ♖h5

A consequence of the error at move 26: the rook becomes active.

31 fxg4 ♖xh2+ 32 ♔f3 ♔e7 33 ♖a8 ♗c4 34 ♘f5+ ♔d7 35 ♖h8 ♖xc2?

The losing error. It is not worth giving up the h7-pawn in exchange for the c2-pawn, because the inevitable fall of the f6-pawn will free the g4-pawn to advance. Suetin recommended 35...♗e2+ 36 ♔f4 ♖f2+ 37 ♔e3 ♖h2.

36 ♖xh7+ ♔c8 37 ♖h6 ♖b2 38 ♖xf6 ♖xb4 39 g5 ♗d3

The passed pawns are nasty chaps. Once they are set in motion it is difficult to hold them back: 39...♖b1 40 g6 b4 (or 40...♖f1+ 41 ♔g4 b4 42 ♘e7+ ♔d7 43 ♖xf1 ♗xf1 44 g7, etc.) 41 ♘e3 ♗a2 42 g7.

40 ♖e6 d5 41 ♘e7+

41 g6 wins more simply. For instance: 41...dxe4+ 42 ♔e3 ♗c4 43 ♖xe4 ♖b3+ 44 ♔f4 ♖d3 45 ♖xc4 bxc4 46 g7, etc.

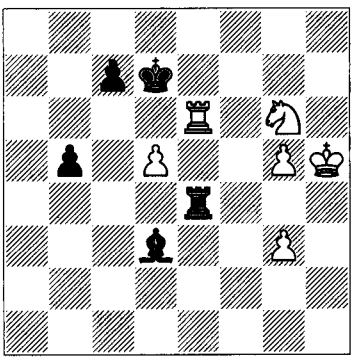
41...♔d7 42 exd5 ♖b3

Other possibilities are no good either. For example: 42...♖a4 43 g6 ♖a8

(or 43...♗c4 44 g7 ♖a8 45 ♖e5) 44 ♘c6 ♖f8+ 45 ♔e3 ♗f5 46 ♘e5+ ♔c8 47 g7 ♖g8 48 ♖f6 ♗h7 49 ♖f7, etc.

43 ♔f4 ♖b4+ 44 ♔f3 ♖b3 45 ♔g4 ♖b4+ 46 ♔h5 ♖e4 47 ♘g6! *(D)*

B



A beautiful solution. The knight controls the key squares.

47...b4

47...♖xe6 loses to 48 dxe6+ ♔d6 (or 48...♔e8 49 ♘f4 ♗e4 50 g6 b4 51 ♔h6 ♔f8 52 g7+) 49 ♘f4 ♗c2 50 g6 b4 51 ♔h6 b3 52 g7 b2 53 g8♕ b1♕ 54 ♕d8+ ♔c6 55 e7, etc.

48 ♘f8+ ♔d8 49 g6 ♖xe6 50 g7! ♗e2+ 51 ♔g5 ♖e4 52 ♔f6?

It does look utterly unimportant, but 52 ♔f5 was essential, and winning.

52...♖g4 53 ♘g6 ♖xg6+?

Presumably Black had already resigned in his mind. If he had not, then he may well have noticed 53...♗b5! 54 g8♕+ ♗e8, followed by 55...♖xg6+, closing himself in an impregnable fortress. I find it ironic that David Bronstein, who believed in miracles, passed by this miraculous salvation.

54 ♔xg6 ♗d3+ 55 ♔h6 1-0

Donner – Fischer

Piatigorski Cup, Santa Monica 1966
King's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 0-0 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♘f3 ♘bd7 7 0-0 e5 8 e4 c6 9 ♖b1

By removing the rook from a1, White side-steps the usual pressure on the long diagonal and supports the advance of his b-pawn. Donner was not in the mood to enter the then popular lines after 9 h3 ♕b6 (or 9...♕a5).

9...a6

In case of 9...exd4 10 ♘xd4 ♖e8 White should revert to 11 h3.

10 b4?!

This is the expected follow-up to 9 ♖b1, but it is unconvincing. On 10 ♕c2 Black has the good reply 10...b5 11 ♖d1 ♕e7 and now 12 dxe5 ♘xe5 or 12 b3 ♖b8 as recommended by Geller. It was not too late to go back to 10 h3, planning to meet 10...b5 with 11 c5. In case of 10...♖e8, 11 ♗e3 b5 12 a3 is good.

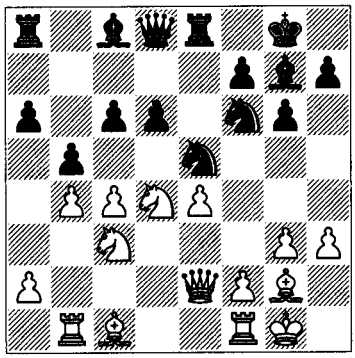
10...exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♖e8 12 h3

By playing b4, White has made c4 more vulnerable. White would probably like to protect the weakness by 12 ♘c2 ♘e5 13 ♘e3, but 13...♘fg4 is unpleasant. 12 b5 looks consistent with ♖b1 and b4, but then 12...c5 is quite unpleasant for White. Therefore Donner reverts to some standard procedures, but at this point 12 h3 looks too slow, given that Black has some targets on the queenside.

12...♘e5 13 ♕e2 b5! *(D)*

Before his knight is chased from the centre, Black manages to secure an

W



active post for it at c4. Black has seized the initiative.

14 cxb5 cxb5 15 ♖d1 ♗b7 16 f4?

On his return from Santa Monica, Ivkov correctly pointed out that this move seriously worsens White's position. Like a soap bubble, it expands until it bursts.

16...♘c4 17 ♕d3 ♖c8 18 ♔h2 ♕c7 19 ♖b3 ♖e7

White has protected himself from surprises on the open c-file, but the e4-pawn is also vulnerable. By doubling rooks, Black increases his pressure.

20 ♖e1 ♖ce8 21 ♘c2 ♕c8

The pressure continues to mount against White's position; now Black plans 22...♕a8. The over-inflated bubble finally bursts.

22 ♘e3 ♘xe3 23 ♖xe3 ♘xe4 24 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 25 ♕xd6 ♖d7 26 ♕c5 ♖c7 27 ♘xe4 ♖xc5 28 ♘xc5 ♗d4 0-1

It is not by chance that all of the games we have analysed in this section of the chapter are from the second half of the 20th century and mostly from towards its end. In earlier periods, players were not ready to engage in such bold flights of imagination so early in the opening. Even today the counter-advance on the same wing is a restricted field of pawn play. We can ascribe that to various reasons, but the major one lies in the fact that in the opening Black and White have their natural theatre of action: as a rule, the board is divided by the nature of the central pawn-formation. This brings us to our final major topic...

Wing Play Met by Counterplay on the Other Wing

The third part of this chapter is devoted to simultaneous attacks on opposite wings. The Sicilian Defence provides many excellent examples on this theme, so it is here that we start our examination. In the Open Sicilian, there is an undefined, potentially unstable centre, and we encounter all types of pawn advances. In general the kingside is White's, and the queenside is Black's. It is the pawn-structure that determines the division. Black launches minority attacks on the queenside, making use of his play on the semi-open c-file. White has somewhat more force in the centre and commands a spatial advantage, and finds it natural to attack on the kingside. The board becomes a sensitive set of scales, swayed by the players' tactical shrewdness and the efficiency of their play.

Janošević – Bertok
Vinkovci 1958
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 g6 6 ♗e3 ♗g7 7 f3 ♘c6 8 ♕d2 0-0 9 0-0-0 ♘xd4 10 ♗xd4 ♗e6

This continuation was fashionable in the 1950s and has attracted followers again in recent times. The purpose of the exchange on d4 is to prepare ...♕a5, to occupy the semi-open c-file with the king's rook, and then counter White's kingside play with a minority attack on the queenside. A major drawback of this plan is that to reach a5 the queen will have to lose a precious tempo.

11 ♔b1

By preparing to meet 11...♕a5 with 12 ♘d5, White earns time to stabilize his queenside.

11...♕c7 12 g4

Opinions have differed on this point. Many players think that 12 h4 is quicker and that the advance of the h-pawn does not need supporting with g4. For instance, after 12...♖fc8 13 h5 ♕a5 (13...♘xh5 was refuted by 14 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 15 g4 ♘f6 16 ♕h6+ ♔g8 17 e5 dxe5 18 g5 ♘h5 19 ♗d3 in Evans-Zuckerman, USA Ch, New York 1966/7) 14 h6 ♗h8 (14...♖xc3 is unjustified) 15 ♘d5 ♕xd2 16 ♖xd2 ♘xd5 17 exd5 ♗d7 18 ♗xh8 ♔xh8 19 ♗d3 (analysis by Efim Geller) White seeks a spatial advantage in the endgame.

12...♖fc8 13 h4 ♕a5 14 a3 ♖ab8 15 h5 b5

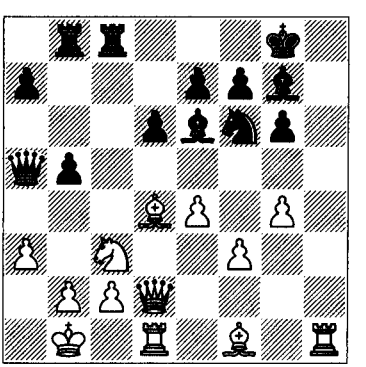
White's attack on the kingside is matched by Black's on the queenside, and whoever is quicker will win! The next game illustrates how modern masters have enriched the options for both sides in this sequence, which in the 1950s was considered sacred.

16 hxg6

It was the Croatian master Vladimir Vuković who in the early 1950s recommended the paradoxical move 16 h6, renouncing the idea of opening the h-file. 16...♗h8 17 ♘d5 (but not 17 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 18 ♘d5, when 18...b4 seizes the initiative, Ostermeyer-Sosonko, Mannheim 1975) gives White more space and somewhat the better endgame. It is important that 16...b4 fails to refute White's idea, since both 17 ♘b5 ♖xb5 18 ♗xb5 ♕xb5 19 hxg7 bxa3 20 ♕d3!, Grishchuk-Cebalo, Bled 1999, and 17 ♘d5 ♘xd5 18 hxg7 ♘c3+ 19 ♔a1 f6 20 ♖e1 prove better for White.

16...hxg6 *(D)*

Geller was sceptical about this continuation and recommended instead 16...fxg6.



17 ♕g5

The sudden sally of the queen is intended to slow down Black's attack and prepare 18 e5, seizing the initiative.

17...♕c7 18 e5 ♘e4!

In 1951 Rabar and Bertok analysed the sacrifice 18...dxe5 19 ♗xe5 ♕b7 21 ♗xb8 ♖xb8. However, in Janošević-Cuderman, Yugoslav Ch, Sarajevo 1958, Black played the text-move, sacrificing a whole piece to speed up his counter-attack.

19 fxe4 dxe5 20 ♗f2

This was Janošević's improvement over the weak 20 ♗xa7, which he played against Cuderman.

20...b4 21 axb4 ♖xb4 22 ♖h3!

22 ♕d2 would be punished by either 22...♖cb8 or 22...♕a5!, while 22 ♗e1 would be met as in the game.

The text-move seems logical, because now 22...♖cb8 could be met by 23 ♘b5, giving back some material to appease Black's anger. The rook on the third rank will join the defence of the king.

22...♖xe4 23 ♗a6 ♖xg4 24 ♕d2 ♖b8 25 ♘b5 ♕c6 26 ♕a5 ♖b4!

An excellent tactician, Janošević tries to repulse the attack tactically, but Black responds in like manner.

27 ♖c3

27 ♕xb4 fails to 27...♕xa6, and 27 ♖d8+ to 27...♖xd8 28 ♕xd8+ ♗f8.

27...♖8xb5?!

In his commentary Bertok wrote that he dismissed 27...♖4xb5 because of 28 ♕d8+ (he saw that 28 ♖d8+? loses to 28...♔h7 29 ♖xc6 {29 ♖xb8 ♕h1+ mates} 29...♖xb2+ and Black mates!), based on 28...♔h7 29 ♕xb8 ♕xa6? (29...♗a2+ is the only chance) 30 ♖h1+ ♗h6 31 ♖xh6+ ♔xh6 32 ♕h8+, when White mates. However, he missed that after 28...♗f8, 29 ♖xc6? again does not work because of 29...♖xb2+, etc. It mattered more than it seemed which rook captured on b5.

28 ♕xb4

28 ♕d8+ obviously fails to 28...♔h7 29 ♖xc6 ♖xb2+ 30 ♔c1 ♗h6+, etc.

28...♕xa6 29 ♖d8+ ♗f8 30 ♕xe7 ♕a2+ 31 ♔c1 ♕xb2+ 32 ♔d2 ♖d5+ 33 ♖d3 ♖xd3+ 34 ♔xd3 ♗f5+ 35 ♔e2 ♕xc2+ 36 ♔f1?

A grave error in time-trouble. 36 ♔e1 is correct. For example: 36...♕c1+ 37 ♔e2 ♗g4+ 38 ♔d3 ♕d1+ (38...e4+ 39 ♔d4 ♕b2+ 40 ♔xe4 ♕e2+ 41 ♗e3 ♗f5+ 42 ♔d5), and now:

a) 39 ♔c4? loses to 39...♗e2+ 40 ♔c3 ♕c1+ and here 41 ♔b3 ♗d1+ or 41 ♔b4 ♕b2+ 42 ♔a4 ♗d1+ 43 ♔a5 ♕a2+ 44 ♔b5 (or 44 ♔b4 ♕b3+) 44...♕a4+, etc.

b) 39 ♔c3 ♕f3+ 40 ♔c4 (not 40 ♔b4? ♕b7+) 40...♗e6+ 41 ♔b5 and there is no win.

36...♕d1+ 37 ♔g2

Or 37 ♗e1 ♗d3+ 38 ♔g2 ♕e2+ 39 ♔h3 ♗f5+, etc.

37...♗e4+ 0-1

This typical Sicilian brawl was imbued with tactical strokes on both wings, as well as instructive errors.

Svidler – Tisdall

Torshavn 1997

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 g6 6 ♗e3 ♗g7 7 f3 0-0 8

♕d2 ♘c6 9 0-0-0 ♘xd4 10 ♗xd4 ♗e6 11 ♔b1 ♕c7 12 g4 ♖fc8 13 h4 ♕a5 14 a3

This move, while natural, does weaken the queenside pawn-structure, so White has recently sought to improve with 14 ♕g5:

a) 14...♕xg5 15 hxg5 ♘d7 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 and now 17 ♗e2 gave White an advantageous endgame in Ivanchuk-Ki.Georgiev, Tilburg 1993, while in I.Gurevich-Ward, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1994, White improved further by 17 ♖h4.

b) In Z.Almasi-Ki.Georgiev, Zonal tournament, Odorheiu Secuiesc 1995, Georgiev tried to repair things and played 14...b5, but after 15 ♕xb5 ♕c7 16 ♕a4 ♖ab8 17 ♔a1 a5 18 ♗b5 ♕b7 19 ♖b1 he had no compensation for the sacrificed material.

14...♖ab8

A passionate defender of Black's position, Georgiev resorted to 14...h5 in Istratescu-Ki.Georgiev, Yugoslav Team Ch, Nikšić 1997, but still faced difficulties in the passive ending after 15 g5 ♘e8 16 ♘b5 ♕xd2 17 ♖xd2 a6 18 ♗xg7 ♘xg7 19 ♘d4.

15 h5 b5 16 ♘d5!?

White continued 16 hxg6 hxg6 17 ♘d5 in Evans-Zuckerman, USA Ch, New York 1969. The game concluded 17...♕xd2 18 ♖xd2 ♘xd5 19 exd5 ♗xd5 20 ♗xg7 ♗xf3 21 ♖h3 ♗xg4 22 ♖g3 ♔xg7 23 ♖xg4 ♖c5 24 ♖e4 ♖b7 25 b4 ♖h5 26 ♔b2 ½-½; Black certainly has plenty in return for the piece. Svidler's move is subtly different.

16...♕xd2 17 ♖xd2 ♘xd5

17...♗xd5 looks dubious in view of 18 exd5 a6 19 hxg6 fxg6 (or 19...hxg6 20 ♖dh2) 20 ♗e2.

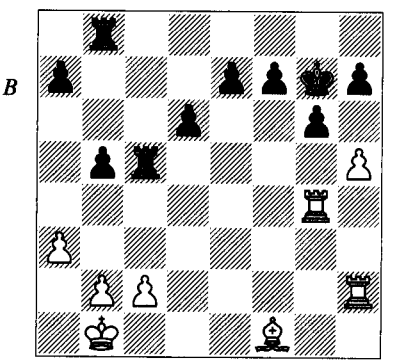
18 exd5

Another little finesse.

18...♗xd5 19 ♗xg7 ♗xf3 20 ♖h3 ♗xg4 21 ♖g3 ♔xg7

21...♗xh5 22 ♗d4 a6 gives Black one more pawn, but the bishop is poorly placed at h5 and it will be more difficult for him to mobilize his pawns.

22 ♖xg4 ♖c5 23 ♖h2 *(D)*



A nice little point which compares favourably with the position in the game Evans-Zuckerman (see the note to White's 16th move) is that the h5-pawn makes it hard for Black to advance his pawns.

23...f5 24 ♖g3

The rook will be able to use the third rank to penetrate Black's camp.

24...♖e5

If 24...♔f6 at once, White continues 25 hxg6 hxg6 26 ♖h6 ♖g8 27 ♗e2.

25 ♗d3

White now threatens 26 hxg6 hxg6 27 ♖hg2.

25...d5?

Black opens his third so that he can protect the g6-pawn, but defending it by 25...♔f6 26 hxg6 hxg6 27 ♖h6 ♖g8 looks much more natural.

26 hxg6 hxg6 27 ♖h5!

This subtle move was probably overlooked by Black, who now loses either the f5-pawn or the b5-pawn. The weak 25th move has its price.

27...♔f6 28 ♖h6 ♖e1+ 29 ♔a2 ♖g8 30 ♗xb5 e5

In case of 30...f4 31 ♖d3 e6 32 c4 dxc4 33 ♗xc4 it remains unclear how Black can advance his pawns.

31 ♖h7 f4

The pawn-mass looks menacing, but it is not so easy to set it in motion. 31...g5, for example, is met by 32 ♖c3 g4 33 ♗d7 ♔g5 34 ♗e6 ♖d8 35 ♖f7 f4 (or 35...♖f1 36 ♖c5) 36 ♖c6.

32 ♖c3 e4

It is too late for 32...g5 because of 33 ♗d7 e4 (or 33...g4 34 ♖h5) 34 ♖c6+ ♔e5 35 c3 f3 36 ♖f7 and the king is caught in the net.

33 ♖c5 f3

If 33...♖d8 then 34 ♖c6+ ♔g5 35 ♖xa7 gives White passed pawns of his own.

34 ♖xd5 ♖b8

Black's last hope is to eliminate the guardian of the f1-square. Instead, 34...f2 fails to 35 ♖h4, when White is ready for a transition into a won rook endgame, while 34...e3 is best disposed of by 35 ♖h3 f2 36 ♖f3+ ♔g7 37 ♖e5, etc.

35 ♖h4 g5

The intended 35...♖xb5 is refuted by 36 ♖f4+.

36 ♖h6+ ♔g7 37 ♖c6 1-0

Comparing this game with Janošević-Bertok, we notice the little subtleties chess masters have acquired in the four decades of tournament experience that separate them.

Liberzon – Adorjan

Moscow – Budapest 1971

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 g6 5 ♘c3 ♗g7 6 ♗e3 ♘f6 7 ♗c4 0-0 8 ♗b3

The manoeuvre ♗c4-b3 covers the future residence of the white king and forms a natural part of White's whole plan by hindering Black's counterplay in the centre and pinning the f7-pawn. However, as long as ♗b3 is not forced upon White, he does better to invest time in developing moves.

8...d6 9 f3 ♗d7

Black responds naturally. In the Dragon, this move is mostly played to vacate c8 for the rook, but this time there are some additional ideas.

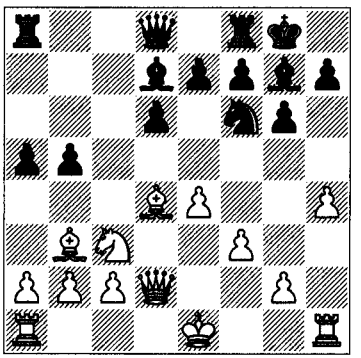
10 ♕d2 ♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 b5

Having finished his basic development, Black starts his minority attack. 11...a5 has also been tried, but 12 a4 stops Black's ambitions.

12 h4

If White reluctantly plays 12 0-0, then 12...b4 equalizes in simple fashion. White's attempt to prevent his opponent's active play by the immediate 12 a4, hoping for 12...b4, is unimpressive due to 12...bxa4 13 ♘xa4 ♗e6. Therefore, he chooses the standard weapon against the Dragon.

12...a5 *(D)*



13 a4

By his prompt queenside pawn advance, Black has managed to provoke his opponent into compromising his king's potential refuges on both sides of the board. However, in a number of games White has not stooped to defending and opted instead for the sharp 13 h5. His idea is to meet 13...a4 with 14 ♗xf6 exf6 15 ♗d5 ♖c8, when 16 hxg6 hxg6 17 ♖h6, as in Apicella-Moldovan, Bucharest 1993, looks unpleasant for Black. However, the more active 13...e5 14 ♗e3 a4 15 ♗d5 b4 16 ♘e2 ♘xd5 17 ♕xd5 ♗e6 18 ♕d2 d5 worked in Black's favour in Tolnai-Leko, Hungarian Ch 1992.

13...bxa4 14 ♘xa4

On 14 ♗xa4, the reply 14...♖b8 is good. White is still in two minds where to castle, but Black must be cautious too – his a5-pawn may become vulnerable.

14...e5

14...♗e6 was once considered dubious in view of 15 ♘b6 (for example, 15...♖b8 16 ♘d5), but in Shirov-Ivanchuk, Wijk aan Zee 1999, 15...♖a6 16 ♘d5 ♗xd5 17 exd5 ♕c7 improved Black's play, although he still had to fight for equality.

15 ♗e3

In the game Tseshkovsky-Forintos, Sochi 1974, White became greedy and embarked upon a suspicious tactical escapade: 15 ♗b6 ♕b8 16 ♗xa5 ♖a6 17 ♗c4 ♗h6.

15...♗e6 16 ♘b6 ♖b8 17 ♕xa5

An alternative is 17 ♘c4 ♗xc4 18 ♗xc4 ♖xb2 19 ♗b3, trapping the rook, but the energetic 19...d5 20 exd5 e4 21 ♗d4 ♖xb3 22 cxb3 exf3 seizes the initiative.

17...♗xb3 18 cxb3 d5

Finally the central thrust leads to simplifications and level play.

19 ♘xd5

19 exd5 ♘d7 is also equal.

19...♘xd5 20 ♕xd5 ♕xd5 21 exd5 ♖xb3 22 ♗c5 ♖c8 23 ♗a3 e4 24 0-0 ½-½

This was a very modern approach for a game played thirty years ago. Subsequent feverish exploration turned the Dragon into a more complex theoretical issue and the following game by Tiviakov, one of the young partisans of the Dragon, shows the difference.

Ulybin – Tiviakov
USSR 1987
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 g6 6 ♗e3 ♗g7 7 f3 0-0 8 ♕d2 ♘c6 9 ♗c4 ♗d7 10 h4 h5

Black has suffered many notorious losses by allowing the h-pawn to advance unchallenged. This attitude was at least partly prompted by the old wisdom that one should not move pawns on the wing where one is being attacked. It took some time until he was ready to see things from another angle and oppose White's advance.

11 0-0-0 ♘e5 12 ♗b3 ♖c8 13 ♗g5

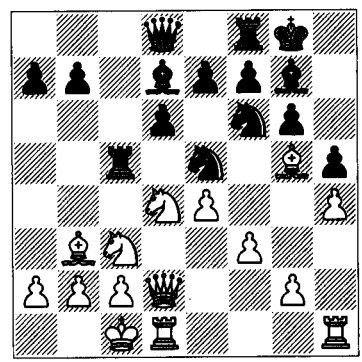
White has a variety of alternatives:

a) Cautious players examined the preparatory 13 ♔b1, but White's position after 13...♘c4 14 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 did not prove convincing: Black has enough counterplay, while White has lost some precious time.

b) Not surprisingly, the sharp 13 ♗h6 attracted more attention and a remarkable amount of energy was invested in its exploration. Eliminating the fianchettoed bishop looks like a good idea in itself: the black king will be more vulnerable and those nightmarish threats on the long dark-square diagonal will be gone. After 13...♗xh6 14 ♕xh6 Black has no time for counter-threats by 14...a5 due to 15 f4, which demonstrates the weakness of the g6-pawn (15...♘fg4 16 ♕g5 helps him little). However, White's king also proves vulnerable, as 14...♖xc3 15 bxc3 ♕a5 shows. White must then attend to his opponent's threats. 16 ♔b2 is just a loss of time due to 16...♖c8, while 16 g4 fails to 16...♕xc3 17 ♔b1 a5 18 gxh5 a4, as in Golubev-Dautov, USSR 1985. White must play the patient 16 ♔b1, when 16...♕xc3 17 ♘e2 ♕c5 18 g4 a5 is too slow for Black as 19 ♘f4 threatens 20 ♘xh5. However, the logical 16...b5, with ideas of ...♘c4 closing the a2-g8 diagonal, keeps the game in the balance.

Thus, 13 ♗g5 came into fashion. The move seemed the most appropriate, as it is harder for Black to generate counterplay on the queenside, while at the proper moment ♗xf6 may cause Black a great deal of harm.

13...♖c5 *(D)*



I do not recall who was the first to make this excellent defensive move. The rook is ready to sacrifice itself for the g5-bishop and its influence is felt all the way to h5.

14 ♔b1

14 g4 has attracted more followers. White has several possibilities after 14...hxg4:

a) 15 h5 ♘xh5 and now:

a1) The violent 16 ♘d5 ♖e8 17 ♖xh5 gxh5 18 ♕h2 was answered by 18...♖xd5 19 ♗xd5 ♕b6, when White's attack was losing ground, in Matsuura-Vescovi, Santos 1997.

a2) White therefore turned to 16 f4, but after 16...♘c4 17 ♕f2 b5 18

♘d5 ♖e8 19 f5 a5 20 ♕h4 again 20...♖xd5 proved fatal (21 exd5 ♕b6 forebodes nothing good for White), as in Kravtsov-Soloviov, Russian Cht (St Petersburg) 1999.

b) Unwilling to leave a stone unturned in this line, White tried 15 f4, but then 15...♘c4 16 ♕d3 (on 16 ♕e2 Black has successfully played 16...b5, while Tiviakov considers 16...♕c8 appropriate; in both cases the tactical menace ...♘xb2 plays an important role) 16...b5 17 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 18 e5 dxe5 19 ♘dxb5 ♘xb2 20 ♕xg6+ ♗g7 21 ♔xb2 exf4 22 ♔c1 ♕c8 offers Black good play, as in Lavrentev-Efremov, corr. 1996-8.

In the end 14 f4 ♘c4 15 ♕d3 was also tested. Black then defends calmly by 15...b5 16 e5 ♘g4 when 17 exd6 is met by tactical means: 17...♖xg5 18 hxg5 ♘f2 proves possible (19 ♕e2 ♘xd1 20 dxe7 ♘xc3 21 bxc3 ♕a5). The black rook does an excellent job on its fourth rank.

14...b5

In order to survive, Black must seek chances on the queenside. For the moment the c4-square is secured and 15...a5 is threatened.

15 g4 hxg4 16 h5 ♖xc3

Now that ...b5 has been played, 16...♘xh5 is not as good as earlier, as after 17 ♘d5 ♖e8 18 ♖xh5 gxh5 19 ♕h2 ♖xd5 20 ♗xd5 ♕b6 the pressure on b2 is absent and Black must resort to more forceful means to survive.

17 bxc3 ♘xh5?

Having avoided the worst, Black clumsily succumbs to a standard menace. Smirin demonstrated 17...♘xf3 18 ♘xf3 ♘xe4 19 ♕h2 ♘xc3+ 20 ♔c1 ♕a5 21 hxg6 ♘xa2+ 22 ♗xa2 ♕a3+ with perpetual check.

18 ♖xh5 gxh5 19 ♕h2

The threat is simple – 20 ♕xh5 followed by 21 ♖h1 and mate. Black's only answer now is to close the b3-bishop's diagonal.

19...♘c4 20 ♕xh5 f6 21 ♘xb5

Black has parried the threat on the h-file, but by weakening his king on the a2-g8 diagonal he has exposed himself to this tactical stroke.

21...♗xb5

Black's choice is reduced to several losing possibilities, of which 21...fxg5 22 ♗xc4+ e6 23 ♘xd6 ♕c7 (to prevent 24 ♘f5) looks best, although 24 fxg4 leaves Black without a good reply. 21...♗e6 22 ♗h6 ♕e8 loses to 23 ♕xe8 ♖xe8 24 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 25 ♘c7.

22 ♗h6 ♕d7

22...♕e8 fails again, this time to 23 ♕xg4 ♖f7 24 ♖g1 ♕f8 25 ♕e6 ♔h7 26 ♗xg7. Defending the b5-bishop by 22...e5 loses to 23 ♕xg4 ♕c7 24 a4 ♗a6 25 ♗xg7 ♕xg7 26 ♖xd6. After 22...♕c8 23 ♖g1 the king will find himself in the open, like in the game.

23 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 24 ♖g1 f5 25 exf5 ♖xf5

After 25...♕xf5 26 ♖xg4+ ♔f6 27 ♕h6+ ♔f7 28 ♖f4 the queen is gone.

26 ♕xg4+ ♔f6 27 ♕g7+ ♔e6 28 ♖e1+ ♔d5 29 ♖xe7 ♕d8 30 ♗xc4+ ♗xc4 31 ♕d4+ ♔c6 32 ♕xc4+ ♔b6 33 ♕d4+ ♖c5 34 ♕b4+ ♖b5 35 ♖b7+ ♔xb7 36 ♕xb5+ ♔c8 37 ♕c6+ ♔b8 38 a4 a5

Otherwise the pawn will advance to a6, leading to zugzwang.

39 c4 ♕f8 40 ♕b6+ ♔c8 41 ♕a6+ ♔b8 42 ♔a2 ♕f4 43 ♕b5+ ♔c8 44 ♕d5 ♔d7 45 ♔b2 ♕f6+ 46 c3 ♔e7 47 ♕e4+ ♔f8 48 f4 ♕h4 49 ♕f5+ 1-0

In this game Black went down in the turbulent waters of the Dragon, but his effort enriched our theoretical experience in general. Chess masters have been able to apply the lessons from these sensitive Dragon positions to other types of pawn movements in other openings.

Jušić – Cebalo

Croatian Team Ch, Tučepi 1996
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 g4 ♘c6

For a long time now 6...h6 has rightly prevailed, as then White must spend further time achieving what he now gets for free.

7 g5 ♘d7 8 ♗e3 ♗e7 9 h4

9 ♖g1 0-0 transposes into other popular lines. After 10 ♕h5 g6 11 ♕h6 ♘de5 12 0-0-0 f6 Black had a fine game in Kengis-Cvitan, Biel 1990. 10 ♕d2 a6 11 0-0-0 ♘xd4 12 ♗xd4 b5 13 f4 (if 13 a3 then 13...♖b8) 13...b4 14 ♘e2 ♕a5 15 ♔b1 e5 also satisfied Black in Ljubojević-Kasparov, Belfort 1988. He was in time to engage White on the queenside and slow down his attack on the other side of the board.

9...0-0 10 ♕h5

This is rarer than 10 ♕d2 or 10 ♕e2, but is a typical idea in numerous Sicilian lines. It makes it possible for White to castle queenside, which creates some aggressive tactical threats.

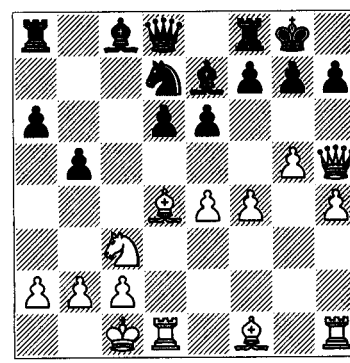
10...♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 a6 12 0-0-0 b5

A natural reaction: White is going to attack on the kingside, and a counterattack on the queenside is the only appropriate reply.

13 f4 *(D)*

Note that 13 ♗d3 would be well answered by 13...♘e5 (not the careless 13...♖e8 or 13...b4, which would be punished by 14 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 15 ♕h6+ ♔h8 16 e5), while 13 a3 just encourages Black to choose the strong reply 13...♖b8.

B



13...♗b7?

When there are attacks on opposite wings, timing becomes crucial. Just one lost tempo can turn the tables. In our game Cebalo plays the most natural-looking move one can think of, and yet that move loses. Having played 12...b5, Black should have advanced the pawn further – 13...b4, when 14 ♗d3 is answered by 14...♘c5 (but not 14...bxc3 15 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 16 ♕h6+ ♔h8 17 e5) 15 ♗xc5 dxc5 16 e5 g6, and now 17 ♕f3 fails to 17...bxc3 18 ♕xa8 ♕b6.

There is also 13...♖e8 14 f5 ♗f8 15 ♗h3 b4 16 fxe6 fxe6 17 ♘d5 g6, when Black seems to hold on in spite of the danger hanging over his head; e.g., 18 ♕f3 (18 ♕g4 may be met by 18...♘e5) 18...exd5 19 e5 ♘c5 (19...dxe5 20 ♕xd5+ ♔h8 21 ♗e3 is weaker).

14 ♗h3

Black is now a step behind.

14...♖e8

It is now too late for 14...b4, since 15 ♘d5 exd5 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 ♕h6+ followed by 18 ♗f5 wins.

15 f5 exf5

15...♘f8 loses to 16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 ♕h6+ ♔g8 18 f6. 15...♗f8 might appear better, but after 16 g6 fxg6 17 fxg6 h6 18 ♖hf1 Black is vulnerable on the open file; for instance 18...b4 19 ♖f7 bxc3 20 ♕f3, threatening 21 ♖xg7+ with mate and if 20...♖e7 then 21 ♗xe6.

16 exf5 ♗xh1 17 g6!

The mortal blow.

17...fxg6 18 fxg6 ♘f8

After 18...♘f6 19 ♗e6+ ♔f8 20 gxh7 or 18...h6 19 ♗e6+ ♔f8 20 ♕f5+ ♘f6 21 ♖xh1 White wins easily.

19 gxh7+ ♘xh7 20 ♗e6+ ♔h8 21 ♗f5 ♗g5+ 22 ♔b1 1-0

Once Black had missed a little detail, he was a step behind and this was enough to seal his fate.

Adams – Cu. Hansen

Wijk aan Zee 1991

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 g4 a6 7 g5 ♘fd7 8 ♗e3 b5

This time in response to the advance g4-g5 Black carries out ...b5 more quickly, but his further queenside development will be cumbersome and somewhat unnatural.

9 a3

Logical, but not the only continuation. In Beliavsky-Soln, Slovenian Ch, Grižе 1996, White chose 9 h4 b4 10 ♘ce2 ♗b7 11 ♗g2 ♘c5 12 ♘g3 ♘bd7 13 0-0 with a good game. 9 f4 has also been tried, when Black should reply with the immediate 9...b4 (instead after 9...♗b7, for instance, 10 f5 causes difficulties).

9...♘b6

Black has also tried to develop with 9...♕c7 10 h4 ♘c6 but the simple 11 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 12 ♕d4 prevents his plans. Then 12...♖b8 13 h5 ♘b6 14 h6 is quite unpleasant for Black. The text-move is not appealing either, but it is the consequence of the particular opening scheme. Note how much time Black has invested in moving this knight and how little it actually accomplishes on the board.

10 h4

Grandmaster Shamkovich preferred 10 ♖g1 ♘8d7 11 f4, with the idea 11...♗b7 12 f5 e5 13 ♘e6. As in the game continuation, White carries out active plans while Black is still struggling to finish his development.

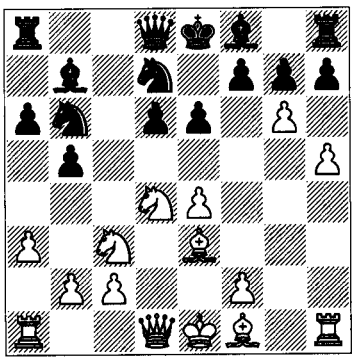
10...♗b7

10...♘8d7 makes a better impression. Then 11 h5 could be met by 11...♘e5.

11 h5 ♘8d7 12 g6! *(D)*

A fine point! In contrast to Black's slow development, White's energetic

B



pawn advance results in an unexpected tactical blow.

12...hxg6 13 hxg6 ♖xh1 14 gxf7+ ♔xf7

After 14...♔e7 15 ♕g4 ♕c8 16 ♕xe6+ ♔d8 17 ♕e8+ ♔c7 18 ♘e6+ ♔c6 19 ♘d5 White has excellent compensation against the uncoordinated black forces.

15 ♕f3+ ♕f6 16 ♕xh1 ♘e5?

Fearing 17 ♘f3, Black decides to give up a pawn for counterplay, but as we shall see the position does not justify his hopes.

16...♘c4 offers stronger resistance.

17 ♘xe6 ♕xe6

If 17...♘bc4 then 18 ♗xc4 ♘xc4 19 ♘g5+ ♔e8 20 ♘h7 ♕e6 21 ♗d4.

18 ♗xb6 d5 19 ♗d4 ♘c6

19...dxe4 fails to 20 ♕h5+ ♘g6 21 ♗h3 ♕c6 22 ♗f5, etc.

20 ♗h3

20 ♕h5+ was a simpler line. White starts to lose his concentration and makes several errors in the following moves.

20...♕e8 21 0-0-0 ♘xd4 22 ♖xd4 ♕e5 23 ♖d3

23 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 24 ♘xd5 also comes into consideration.

23...d4 24 ♘d5 ♗xd5 25 exd5 ♗d6 26 ♖f3+ ♔e7 27 ♖f5 ♕e2 28 ♕g1 ♗e5 29 f4?

White misses a forced win by 29 d6+! ♔xd6 30 ♕g6+ ♗f6 31 ♖xf6+, etc.

29...♗f6 30 ♖xf6 gxf6

If 30...♔xf6 then 31 ♕xd4+ ♔g6 32 ♕g1+, etc.

31 ♕g7+ ♔e8 32 ♕g8+ ♔e7 33 ♕h7+ ♔e8?

33...♔f8 is better, as then 34 ♔b1 can be met by 34...d3 35 cxd3 b4.

34 ♔b1 ♖d8

This move loses instantly, but after 34...d3 35 cxd3 b4 36 ♗d7+ ♔f8 (or 36...♔d8 37 ♗a4) 37 axb4 ♖a7 38 d6 Black loses anyway.

35 ♗e6 1-0

The end smells of time-trouble, but the opening and middlegame were played by White with great energy. Against such an effective pawn attack Black's slow development did not work. The crushing g6 came as early as move 12 and reminded me of another memorable game.

Ivanchuk – Topalov

Las Palmas 1996

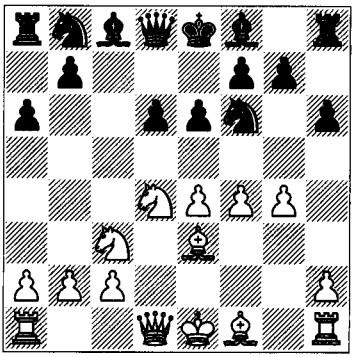
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 g4 h6 8 f4 *(D)*

8...b5

We have seen two games featuring 8...e5 (pages 191 and 192), which proved good. Black has good reasons

B



to react at once in face of the oncoming pawn-storm. 8...♘c6 looks like a serious alternative, but hesitant answers such as 8...♕b6, which can be comfortably met by 9 a3, and the text-move appear suspect.

9 ♗g2 ♗b7 10 g5

Time matters! 10 a3 ♘bd7, for instance, changes the position fundamentally: 11...♘c5 is threatened, while in case of 11 g5 hxg5 12 fxg5 ♘h5 the queen's knight will take its central place at e5.

10...hxg5 11 fxg5 b4

Commentators have condemned this move and expressed a preference for 11...♘h5 12 0-0 ♘d7 13 g6 ♘hf6, but apart from the quiet 14 ♘f3 there is also the sharp 14 gxf7+ ♔xf7 15 ♘xe6 ♔xe6 16 e5 ♗xg2 17 exf6.

12 ♘a4 ♘h5

On 12...♗xe4 there is 13 gxf6 ♗xg2 14 ♖g1, but 12...♘xe4 comes into consideration. Ivanchuk then planned 13 ♕g4 d5 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 0-0-0 with compensation in the form of superior development.

13 0-0 ♘d7

13...g6 would thwart the following thrust, but weaken the f-file and 14 ♕f3 would be difficult to meet.

14 g6

Just as in the previous game, Black has been a step too slow and White grabs his opportunity.

14...♘hf6 15 c3!

A quiet, beautiful move, in perfect harmony with the kingside attack. As 15...bxc3 would now lose to 16 ♕b3, White wins a pawn, crowning his attacking effort with a material gain.

15...♘e5 16 gxf7+ ♔xf7 17 cxb4 ♖h4 18 ♕b3?!

Having achieved a won position, Ivanchuk, like Adams, loses his concentration. The e6-pawn is easily taken care of, while, despite appearances, the queen is misplaced on b3. 18 ♗f4! is strong, threatening 19 ♗xe5 dxe5 20 ♘f3 and at the same time preventing 18...♖g4.

18...♕e8 19 ♖ac1?

When playing 18 ♕b3, White probably intended 19 ♘f5 but 19...♖xe4 20 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 21 ♘g3 ♗d5 must have dissuaded him. However, defending the sensitive point e4 by 19 ♘c3 seems logical.

19...♗xe4 20 ♖c7+ ♔g8 21 ♘xe6

21 ♕xe6+ ♕xe6 22 ♘xe6 is inadequate due to 22...♖g4 23 ♖f2 ♘d5.

21...♖g4!

Black pins the bishop and can ignore all the discovered checks. The finest defensive moves are those which at the same time take part in attacks.

22 ♖xf6?

There was no time for 22 ♖f2 because of 22...♗d5, but 22 ♘f4+ was

indispensable to protect the g2-bishop and to avoid Black's main threat. Of course, 22...d5 guarantees Black fine play.

22...♖xg2+ 23 ♔f1 ♕b5+ 0-1

Despite the sudden reversal of fortunes, this is a highly instructive game with respect to pawn advances in the Scheveningen/Najdorf. We shall pay some further attention to this diverse and complex topic.

Ivanchuk – Topalov
Novgorod 1996
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 e6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 f4 0-0 9 ♔h1 ♕c7 10 a4

Founding his strength in the centre on the highly flexible pawn-pair d6-e6, Black was ready to expand on the queenside. The text-move thwarts this idea.

10...♘c6 11 ♗e3 ♖e8

In the early days of this line, Black had problems deciding between ...♖d8 and ...♖e8. The more natural move prevailed: putting the rook on e8 forms part of a general plan involving ...♘xd4, ...e5 and ...exf4, as the rook is properly placed to exert pressure on the e4-pawn.

12 ♗f3

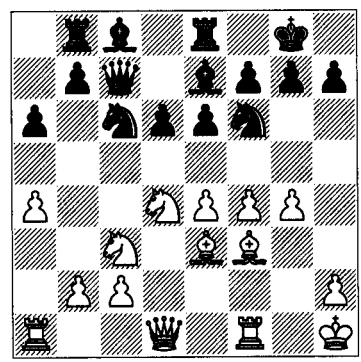
If Black had played 11...♖d8, then 12 ♗f3 could have been met by 12...♘e5. That is one of the reasons why they investigated ...♖d8 in the first place. On f3 the bishop controls the centre and makes Black's pawn advance on the queenside more difficult, but it is also an introduction to a kingside pawn-storm.

12...♖b8

We shall investigate 12...♗d7 in the next game. The text-move has gained wider popularity, because in expectation of the pawn advance g4-g5 Black prefers to have the d7-square reserved for the f6-knight.

13 g4 *(D)*

B



As a rule, the side that starts its attack first can expect to be a significant step ahead. The element of time should always be carefully considered in our assessments.

13...♗f8

A lot of time and analytical effort was invested in the typical simplifying method in the Scheveningen, i.e. 13...♘xd4 14 ♗xd4 e5. The idea is to exchange on f4, control the d5-square by ...♗e6 and then transfer the knight to e5. However, White found a way to squeeze out some advantage by 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 ♗a7 ♖a8 17 g5:

a) 17...♖xa7?! was shown to be dubious on a number of occasions; for

example, Oll-Cvitan, Rapidplay game, Eupen 1995 continued 18 gxf6 ♗xf6 19 ♘d5 ♕d8 20 ♘xf6+ gxf6 21 ♕c1 ♔h8 22 ♕h6 ♖g8 23 ♗h5 ♗g4 24 ♗xg4 ♖xg4 25 ♖ad1 ♕e7 26 ♖g1 f5 27 ♖xg4 fxg4 28 ♖d7.

b) 17...♖d8 18 ♕e2 ♘e8 (after 18...♖xa7 19 gxf6 ♗xf6 20 ♘d5 ♖xd5 21 exd5 ♗e7 22 ♗e4 ♗d6 23 ♕d3 h6 24 ♖f3 b6 25 ♖af1 f6 26 ♖g1 ♕c5 27 ♖xf6 Black was crushed in Tiviakov-Andruet, Torcy 1991) 19 ♗e3 ♗e6 20 ♗g4 ♗c4 21 ♕f2 ♕c6 22 b3 ♗xf1 23 ♖xf1 f6 24 ♘d5, as in Khalifman-Akopian, Ubeda 1997.

Dissatisfied with this, Black resorted to 13...♘d7. Analysing numerous games I was impressed by White's treatment of the position in de Firmian-Irzhanov, World Team Ch, Lucerne 1997: 14 ♗g2 b6 15 g5 ♗b7 16 ♕h5 g6 17 ♕h3! with an advantage.

14 g5 ♘d7 15 ♗g2

By retreating the bishop to g2, White opens the way for the rook manoeuvre ♖f3-h3.

15...♘xd4

After 15...b6 16 ♕h5 ♗b7 17 ♖f3 g6 18 ♕h4 ♘xd4 19 ♗xd4 e5 20 fxe5 ♘xe5 21 ♖h3 White's kingside pressure yields results, as in the game P.H.Nielsen-Jansa, Eikrem memorial, Gausdal 1996.

16 ♗xd4 b5

Black is finally ready for counteraction, but at the cost of ceding the open a-file to White. The cautious alternative 16...b6 might be wiser.

17 axb5 axb5 18 ♖a7 ♕d8

18...♖b7 clearly fails to 19 ♘xb5. On 18...♕c6, 19 f5 is unpleasant. There is no time for 19...b4 because of 20 fxe6 fxe6 21 e5 d5 22 ♕f3. 19...♘e5 is possible, although 20 g6 gives White the initiative.

19 b4!

A fine positional solution. We have already spoken of advancing pawns seizing a spatial advantage and a counter-advance often being an appropriate way to stop them. Besides, the c5-square is denied to the d7-knight and the c3-knight maintained in its important position.

19...e5 20 ♗e3 exf4 21 ♗xf4 ♘e5 22 ♘d5

This is much stronger than grabbing the pawn and dissipating the pressure by 22 ♗xe5 dxe5 23 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 24 ♖fxf7 ♗e6 25 ♖fc7 ♖d2.

22...♗g4

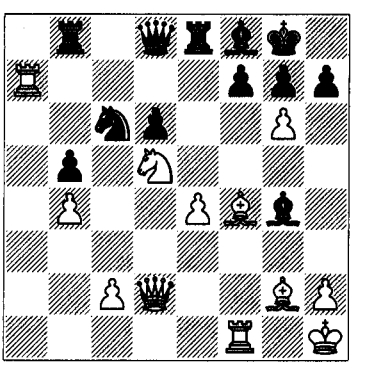
One would prefer 22...♗e6.

23 ♕d2 ♘c6?

Impatient to get rid of the annoying rook on the seventh rank, Black overlooks the tactical stroke that follows. By this point 23...♗e6 was indispensable.

24 g6! *(D)*

B



24...♘xa7

Now that the g5-square has been vacated, 24...hxg6 can be met by 25 ♖xf7. Also, in case of 24...fxg6, 25 ♗g5 ♗e7 26 ♘xe7+ ♘xe7 27 ♕f4 ♗e6 28 ♕h4 ♗d7 29 ♗h3 decides. 24...f6 25 ♖c7 is not agreeable for Black either and Topalov's decision to grab at least what can be grabbed is understandable.

25 gxf7+ ♔h8 26 ♗g5

26 fxe8♕ achieves less in view of 26...♕xe8 27 ♘e3 ♗e6. It is the open f-file that interests White.

26...♕d7 27 fxe8♕ ♖xe8

This time 27...♕xe8 would be punished by 28 ♘f6 gxf6 (or 28...♕e6 29 ♘xg4 ♕xg4 30 ♕f2) 29 ♗xf6+ ♔g8 30 e5 ♗e6 31 ♗d5 (Ivanchuk).

28 ♕f2 ♔g8

28...♗e6 does not work due to 29 ♕xf8+ ♖xf8 30 ♖xf8+ ♗g8 31 ♘f6.

29 e5!

By opening the light-squared diagonal, White threatens 30 ♘b6 or 30 ♘c7, decisively vacating a vital square, this time d5, for the second time in the game.

In case of 29 ♘e7+ Black holds on by 29...♗xe7 30 ♕f7+ ♔h8 31 ♗xe7 ♗e6 32 ♕xe8+ ♕xe8 33 ♖f8+ ♕xf8 34 ♗xf8 ♘c8 35 e5 dxe5 36 ♗c6 (or 36 ♗c5 ♗d7) 36...♘a7 37 ♗e8 ♗d5+ 38 ♔g1 ♘c6.

29...h6

29...♗e6 30 ♘f4 ♗c4 31 e6 is also hopeless for Black.

30 ♘b6 ♕c7 31 ♗d5+ ♔h7

Or 31...♔h8 32 ♕xf8+, etc.

32 ♗e4+ ♔g8 33 ♘d5 ♕d7 34 ♘e7+ 1-0

This time it works: after 34...♗xe7, 35 ♕f7+ ♔h8 36 ♕g6 wins.

Tiviakov – Van Wely

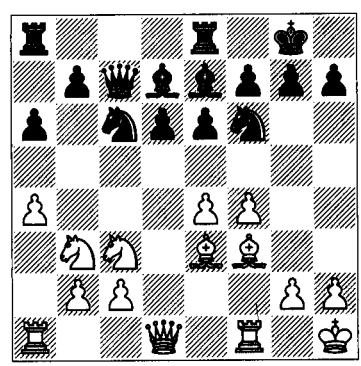
Groningen 1995
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 e6 7 a4 ♘c6 8 0-0 ♗e7 9 ♗e3 0-0 10 f4 ♕c7 11 ♔h1 ♖e8 12 ♗f3 ♗d7

At first Black was reluctant to occupy the d7-square and reserved it for the possible retreat of the knight from f6, but experience taught him that, if necessary, he can spend an additional tempo vacating the square again. From d7 the bishop should facilitate the desired advance of the b-pawn, but by withdrawing the d4-knight from the centre White denies Black his plan...

13 ♘b3 *(D)*

B



13...b6

While in his matches against Karpov, Kasparov invariably opted for 12...♖b8, in Anand-Kasparov, PCA World Ch match (game 9), New York

1995 he preferred 12...♗d7 and here he blocked the a4-pawn by 13...♘a5. However, after 14 ♘xa5 ♕xa5 15 ♕d3 ♖ad8 16 g4 ♗c6 17 b4 White seized the initiative.

14 g4 ♗c8 15 g5 ♘d7

Black manages to retreat in full order, relying on the firmness of his central structure.

16 ♗g2 ♗b7

Black is obviously facing threats on the h-file, whether after the manoeuvre ♖f3-h3 or after an immediate ♕h5, as well as the pawn-thrust f5. Considering the threat, caution would suggest keeping the light-squared bishop at c8 and playing instead 16...♖b8. In that case 17 ♕h5 g6 18 ♕h3 ♘b4 19 f5 can be met by 19...♘e5.

17 ♕h5

After 17 ♖f3 g6 18 ♖h3, 18...♗f8 19 ♕e1 ♗g7 20 ♕h4 ♘f8 meets the defensive requirements. 18...♘b4 also slows down White's kingside play.

17...g6?!

White's 17th move was in part an attempt to provoke weaknesses in Black's kingside, but there was no need to fall in with White's designs. Van Wely himself recognized that fact, and in Lobron-Van Wely, Antwerp 1996 he chose 17...♘b4 (17...♗f8 comes to mind as well).

18 ♕h3 ♘b4?

This move ignores the threat and turns out to be a blank shot in the face of the sweeping attack.

19 f5 ♘xc2

19...exf5 avoids the worst, but after 20 ♘d4 Black is inferior; 20...fxe4?? fails to 21 ♖xf7.

20 fxg6 fxg6 21 ♖f7!

White was given the chance to open the file and that was enough.

21...♘f8 22 ♖af1 ♕c4 23 ♗d2

Avoiding 23 ♕h6 ♕xf1+.

23...e5 24 ♘d5 ♗xd5 25 exd5 h5 26 gxh6 ♔h8

26...♕h4 27 ♕d3 ♘b4 28 ♖xf8+.

27 ♖g7 ♘h7

Or 27...♖a7 28 h7 ♘d7 29 ♖ff7 ♘f6 30 ♕h6, etc.

28 ♕e6 1-0

There can be no doubt that the battle in these games is initially dynamically balanced, but given the tactical nature of the positions, any slip of concentration is usually final.

Tal – Larsen

Candidates match (game 10), Bled 1965

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗e3 ♘f6 7 f4 ♗e7

When White postpones the development of his king's bishop and plays f4 and ♗e3 instead, it is a sign that he plans ♕f3 followed by 0-0-0. Black can thwart this plan by the energetic 7...e5.

8 ♕f3 0-0

For the second time 8...e5 was possible, leading after 9 ♘xc6 (9 ♘f5 ♗xf5 10 exf5 is weak because of 10...♘d4) 9...bxc6 10 f5 ♕a5 11 ♗c4 ♖b8 12 0-0-0 0-0 to a complex struggle. Castling is in some respects a timid reaction.

9 0-0-0 ♕c7

9...♗d7 is a good alternative.

10 ♘db5 ♕b8 11 g4

Black's somewhat passive stance invites White to attack.

11...a6 12 ♘d4 ♘xd4 13 ♗xd4 b5

I remember well that a day after this game was played in Bled, a chess journalist came to the premises of *Šahovski Glasnik* and vehemently defended the opinion that 13...e5 should have been played instead. Soon, however, it dawned upon us that 14 g5 cast doubt on his opinion. 14...♗g4 15 ♕g3 ♗xd1 16 gxf6 ♗xf6 17 ♘d5 looks highly suspicious for Black; e.g., 17...♔h8 18 ♘xf6 exd4 19 ♖g1. 14...exd4 15 gxf6 ♗xf6 16 ♘d5 ♗d8 17 f5 does not look like much of an improvement for Black.

14 g5 ♘d7 15 ♗d3

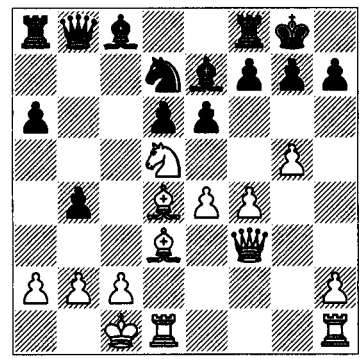
This move was looked upon with a measure of suspicion. However, Tal possessed the practical chess mind of a born attacker. He sensed how Larsen would reply and did not hesitate to lie in ambush.

15...b4

In those years the Sicilian was largely unexplored territory. Larsen chooses a risky move, ignoring or inviting danger. Nevertheless, many years and a great deal of analysis later, it has become clear that his decision was fully justified. If Black had anticipated Tal's attacking plan and wished to avoid it, he might have gone for 15...e5?!, blocking the diagonals towards his kingside. In that unfortunate case we would have missed the splendid knight sacrifice, a motif which became so characteristic in various variations of the Sicilian. The prosaic 16 ♘d5 ♗d8 17 ♗e3 exf4 18 ♗xf4 ♘e5 19 ♕g3 would then have given White the advantage. Thus his actual choice is objectively preferable.

16 ♘d5! *(D)*

B



This deserves an exclamation mark in spite of later discoveries. The move implies courage and keen intelligence, and in any case there is no consistent alternative.

16...exd5

16...♗d8 would not confuse White: the simple 17 h4 keeps the attack going.

17 exd5

The consequences are already visible. Black's kingside is exposed to the glare of the centralized bishop-pair. 18 ♗xh7+ hangs in the air, provoking holes in the king's defences at a moment when Black's forces are passive, uncoordinated and seemingly unable to challenge the dominant white bishops.

17...f5?

17...g6! was suggested as an alternative defence, but it was not until the early 1980s that Kasparov and Nikitin, in their book on the Scheveningen,

gave the idea its probably final form. The critical line is 18 ♖de1 ♗d8 19 ♕h3 (after 19 h4 ♘c5 20 h5 ♘xd3+ 21 ♕xd3 ♗f5 Black blocks the roads to his king), when Black has the clever 19...♘e5! 20 ♕h6 ♗b6! 21 fxe5 ♗xd4 22 ♖e4 ♗f2 (or 22...♕a7); his position is at least satisfactory, and probably superior.

The text-move leaves the black king too exposed.

18 ♖de1 ♖f7

Necessary since the g7-pawn needs protection. 18...♗d8 19 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 20 ♕h5 is pretty bad for Black.

19 h4 ♗b7

After 19...♘f8 20 h5, the threat of 21 g6 is difficult for Black to meet.

20 ♗xf5

Koblents proposed 20 g6 hxg6 21 h5 g5 22 ♗xf5, opening up the black king's position as much as possible.

20...♖xf5 21 ♖xe7 ♘e5

In case of 21...♖f7 White could return to Koblents's idea by 22 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 23 g6+ hxg6 24 h5.

22 ♕e4 ♕f8 23 fxe5 ♖f4 24 ♕e3 ♖f3

Stronger resistance was offered by 24...♗xd5 25 exd6 ♗xh1 (or 25...♖xd4 26 ♕xd4 ♗xh1 27 b3 and it is not clear what Black can do against the deadly threat of h5-h6; note that 27...♖e8 loses to 28 ♕xg7+! ♕xg7 29 ♖xe8+ ♕f8 30 d7) 26 ♖xg7+ ♕xg7 27 ♗xg7 ♖f1+ (if 27...♖e4 then 28 ♕f2) 28 ♔d2 ♔xg7 although after 29 d7 White would eventually prevail.

25 ♕e2 ♕xe7

Or 25...♗xd5 26 exd6 ♕f4+ 27 ♕d2, etc.

26 ♕xf3 dxe5 27 ♖e1 ♖d8 28 ♖xe5 ♕d6 29 ♕f4 ♖f8

If 29...♗xd5, then obviously 30 ♖e8+.

30 ♕e4 b3 31 axb3 ♖f1+ 32 ♔d2 ♕b4+ 33 c3 ♕d6 34 ♗c5 ♕xc5 35 ♖e8+ ♖f8 36 ♕e6+ ♔h8 37 ♕f7 1-0

Tal's victory confirms the old truth: where there is a spatial advantage and initiative, there is a tactical solution. The knight sacrifice at d5 became one of the Sicilian patents.

Shirov – Ivanchuk

Linares 1993

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘c3 ♕c7 6 ♗e2 a6 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 ♗e3 ♗e7 9 f4 d6

The shadow-boxing is over, and the game enters the main system of the Scheveningen.

10 ♕e1

In earlier examples we discussed the continuation 10 a4. If White is less concerned with Black's advance on the queenside and more anxious to begin his own kingside play, then the text-move is one of the popular possibilities. The queen is moved to g3 whence it supports e5 or may take part in the kingside action.

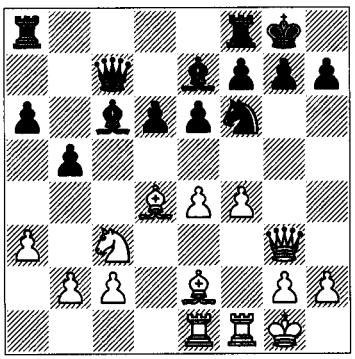
10...0-0 11 ♕g3 ♘xd4

Waiting by 11...♗d7 is in my opinion less consistent. When Black is given the chance to expand on the queenside, he should take it.

12 ♗xd4 b5 13 a3

In case of 13 e5 dxe5 14 fxe5 ♗c5 we see why White so often plays ♔h1.

13...♗b7 14 ♖ae1 ♗c6 *(D)*



We have already seen several games with a dynamic centre where Black has played a queenside minority attack. In the Open Sicilian, where he dominates the semi-open c-file, he uses it in many different systems. This time Black uses his weapon methodically. The text-move vacates the b7-square for the queen, which will enable him to advance his pawn unit, while simultaneously pressing on the white centre.

15 ♔h1

15 ♗f3 would be answered by 15...a5.

15...♕b7 16 ♗d3

Having in mind e5, White logically points his light-squared bishop towards the enemy kingside.

16...b4

There is a typical dilemma when deciding on a pawn advance: delaying it harms your chances, while rushing has even worse consequences; one must simply be reasonably quick. Here, Ivanchuk decides not to delay since otherwise 17 ♕h3 would provoke some potential weaknesses around the black king.

17 axb4

Shirov later varied in Shirov-Benjamin, Horgen 1995 with the surprising but logical 17 ♘d1!?, allowing 17...bxa3 18 bxa3. The a3-pawn will not be in danger, while the knight will move on to the active position at f2. In Shirov-Movsesian, Sarajevo 2000, Black successfully replied 18...♖ac8, preparing the freeing ...♗b5.

17...♕xb4 18 ♘e2 ♕b7 19 e5 ♘h5

Taking on e5 just increases White's pressure.

20 ♕h3 g6 21 ♘g3 dxe5 22 ♗xe5 ♘xg3+

22...♘g7 23 ♘e4 f6 is possible, but passive. Ivanchuk chooses another road, although it looks risky, because his king remains vulnerable.

23 hxg3 ♗b5!

A subtle move: the exchange would favour Black and if White avoids it, then the d3-bishop will be more exposed on the open file.

24 c4

24 ♕h6 f6 25 ♗xg6 is only good enough for a draw.

24...♗c6 25 g4 ♖ad8

The king's rook will be needed on the f-file.

26 ♖e2

If 26 ♖e3 (threatening 27 ♕xh7+), Ivanchuk planned 26...f6 27 ♗c3 e5 28 fxe5 ♗c5 29 ♖ee1 (or 29 ♖e2 fxe5) 29...♖xd3 30 ♕xd3 ♗xg2+ 31 ♔h2 ♗xf1 32 ♖xf1 fxe5.

26...f6 27 ♗c3 e5 28 fxe5 fxe5 29 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 30 ♖xe5

30 ♗xe5 would be met by 30...♕b3 and 30 g5 by 30...♕f7 31 ♗xe5 ♕f1+ 32 ♔h2 ♗xg2.

30...♗g7 31 ♖e3 ♗xc3 32 bxc3 ♖xd3 33 ♖xd3 ♗xg2+ 34 ♕xg2 ♕b1+ 35 ♔h2 ½-½

While this is not such an impressive game perhaps, the play was logical and, as far as the minority attack goes, instructive in its simplicity.

Nunn – Sadler

Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1993
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e5

In our earlier examples 6 ♗e3 was met by 6...e6. Black opted for a 'small centre', restrained but very active in its flexibility. In this way he covered all the central squares, but left his opponent more space in the centre. The text-move opts for a different formation, first analysed extensively in the context of the Boleslavsky Variation. Black seizes some space and enables his light-squared bishop to develop actively, convinced that the potential weakness d5 will be well covered by his pieces.

7 ♘b3 ♗e6 8 f3 ♘bd7

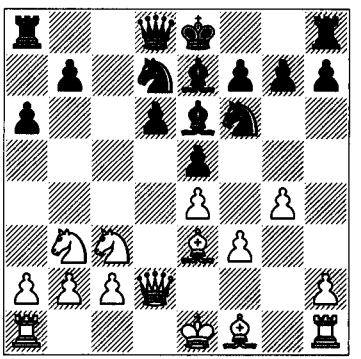
After 8...♘c6 9 ♕d2, Black carried out 9...d5 in Tiviakov-Loginov, Russian Ch, Elista 1996; then 10 exd5 ♘xd5 11 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 12 ♕xd5 ♗xd5 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 14 ♗b6 ♖d6 kept the play level.

9 g4 ♗e7

In Topalov-Gelfand, Madrid 1996, Black speeded up his queenside play with the immediate 9...b5. Then 10 g5 ♘h5 (10...b4 is an alternative) 11 a4 (11 ♘d5 comes into consideration) 11...bxa4 12 ♖xa4 ♗e7 13 ♘d5 ♗xg5 14 ♗xg5 ♕xg5 15 ♘c7+ ♔e7 16 ♘xa8 ♕h4+ 17 ♔d2 ♕g5+ led to a draw by repetition.

10 ♕d2 *(D)*

B



10...b5?!

We have a typical situation where two armies are simultaneously marching on the two wings. Timing is of great importance. With the text-move, Black is somewhat hasty, as the following play will demonstrate. I would prefer 10...h6 and only after 11 0-0-0 to continue 11...b5.

10...0-0 11 0-0-0 ♕c7 would transpose into a currently fashionable continuation. Tiviakov-Morozevich, Wijk aan Zee 2001 continued 12 ♔b1 ♖fc8 (this seems to me questionable: when White's plan of h4, g5 and ♘d5 is carried out, the light-squared bishop will appear at h3 and the rook will feel uncomfortable) 13 g5 (this seems hasty; 13 h4 b5 14 g5 would be answered by

14...b4, but 13 ♕f2, as played in a later game Anand-Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2001, causes Black more difficulties) 13...♘h5 14 ♘d5 (again 14 ♕f2 comes into consideration) 14...♗xd5 15 exd5 ♘b6 and Black kept the balance.

11 a4

The pawn unit a6-b5 is more vulnerable with White's pawn still on g4 than it is after White has played g5. Taking at a4 now would hurt Black more than in Topalov-Gelfand (see the note to Black's 9th move).

11...b4 12 ♘d5 ♗xd5 13 exd5

White threatens 14 g5 ♘h5 15 ♕xb4.

13...♕c7

13...♘b6 fails to 14 a5, but 13...h6 comes into consideration.

14 g5 ♘h5 15 0-0-0 ♘f4

15...a5 surrenders the diagonal to the light-squared bishop (16 ♗b5 0-0 17 ♗c6), so Black decides to embark on a tactical road, defending the b4-pawn indirectly and seeking counterplay after 16 ♗xf4 exf4 17 ♕xf4 0-0, although I must confess I do not then see full compensation for the pawn.

16 h4 h6 17 ♖g1

17 ♗xf4 exf4 18 g6 is not convincing in view of 18...fxg6.

17...hxg5 18 hxg5 ♖h4 19 ♔b1 ♕d8?

Feeling that the time has come to target the g5-pawn, Black overlooks his opponent's reply. However, his choice was not plentiful. 19...♘f8 20 ♕xb4 ♘g2 fails to 21 ♕b6, and 19...♘b6 to 20 ♕f2, while 19...♘g6 allows 20 ♗d3. However, 19...g6 was possible, and superior.

20 ♘d4!

A fine tactical stroke.

20...exd4

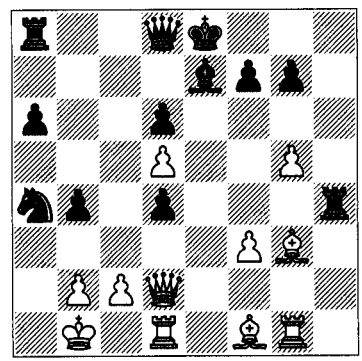
The intended 20...♗xg5 loses to 21 ♘f5 ♖h7 22 ♕xb4.

21 ♗xf4 ♘b6

21...♘e5 does not work due to another tactical solution – 22 ♗g3 and if 22...♘xf3 then 23 ♕g2 wins.

22 ♗g3 ♘xa4 *(D)*

W



A resourceful tactician, Sadler sets a little trap: now 23 ♗xh4? ♘c3+ 24 ♔c1 ♘a2+ would lead to perpetual check.

23 ♗c4

23 ♕xb4 ♘xb2 24 ♕xb2 ♖b8 25 ♗xh4 would eventually win, but the text-move eliminates Black's counter-chances in a more obvious manner.

23...♘c3+

23...♖h5 24 f4 ♕b6 25 ♗b3 ♘c5 26 ♕xd4 g6 (or 26...♔f8 27 ♖h1) 27 ♖de1 is as difficult for Black as the game continuation.

24 bxc3 dxc3

Or 24...bxc3 25 ♕c1 ♖b8+ 26 ♗b3 a5 27 ♕a3.

25 ♕e2 ♕a5 26 ♖de1 ♖a7 27 ♗f4!

A beautiful solution against the threatened 27...♕a3.

27...b3

27...♖xf4 is not available because of 28 ♖h1, with a mating attack. Opening the h-file in the end turned against Black.

28 ♗xb3 ♖b7 29 ♖g4 ♖xg4 30 fxg4 ♕b4 31 ♕xa6 1-0

Being quick and timely in advancing pawns bears fruit, but being hasty can lead to problems. The premature 10...b5 was the initial cause of Black's later difficulties.

Shirov – Lalić

Olympiad, Erevan 1996
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e5 7 ♘b3 ♗e6 8 f3 ♗e7

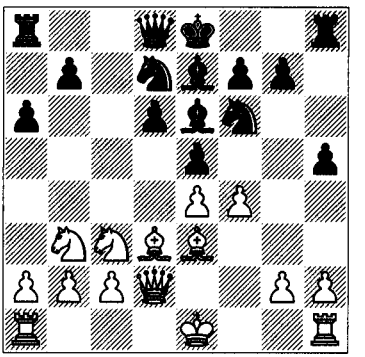
Lalić was considering 8...h5 at once, because in case of 9 ♘d5 ♘xd5 10 exd5 ♗f5 11 ♗d3 ♗xd3 12 ♕xd3 he could fianchetto his dark-squared bishop, but gave up the idea when he concluded that after the text-move 9 g4 could in any case be met strongly by 9...d5 and if 10 g5 then 10...d4.

9 ♕d2 h5

When the rook's pawn advances, it is either to seize space or to deny the opponent the chance to do so. Lalić obviously does it with the latter aim. Since Black is not concerned about the possible 10 ♘d5 ♘xd5 11 exd5 ♗f5 and since he believes his later castling will not be endangered by it, Black's choice is perfectly legitimate. It postpones his queenside play and causes his opponent to change plan...

10 ♗d3 ♘bd7 11 f4 *(D)*

B



Since the g-pawn cannot advance, the task is given to the f-pawn. In view of Black's forthcoming counterplay on the queenside it would be quite perilous to sit doing nothing.

11...b5

On Black's part, the answer is self-evident: facing the threat of f5 he secures a refuge for the e6-bishop. Naturally, ceding ground in the centre by 11...exf4 would allow the b3-knight to return to its dominant central position and would be a colossal strategic error.

12 f5 ♗c4 13 a4 0-0 14 0-0 ♖c8

14...♕c7 would invite 15 axb5 axb5 16 ♘xb5 and after 14...♗xb3 15 cxb3 ♘c5 16 ♗c2 b4 17 ♘d5 Black will remain weak on the light squares.

15 axb5 axb5 16 ♗xc4 ♖xc4

If 16...bxc4, then 17 ♘a5 ♘b6 18 ♕f2 and the c4-pawn is in danger.

17 ♕d3 ♕c8 18 ♘d2 ♖b4

Black's strategic plan, which was started by 9...h5 and continued with a

pawn advance on the other wing, has borne fruit. At this moment he could choose between 18...♘c5 19 ♕e2 ♖xc3 20 bxc3 ♘cxe4 and the sharper text-move.

19 b3 ♘c5 20 ♘d5?!

Missing a fine tactical point. White should prefer the modest 20 ♕e2 ♘xb3 21 cxb3 ♕xc3 22 ♖fc1, leading to a draw.

20...♘xd5 21 ♕xd5 ♗g5!

This must have slipped Shirov's attention.

22 ♗f2

In case of 22 ♗xg5 ♖d4 the white queen is caught in the middle of the board.

22...♗xd2 23 ♕xd2 ♖xe4 24 f6?

Caught by surprise, White does not readjust to the new circumstances and continues in an optimistic vein. After the game Lalić demonstrated 24 ♕xd6 ♘d7 25 ♖a7 ♘f6 26 ♗c5 ♖e8 27 ♕c7 as the way out of the predicament. The 'damage' done by the text-move will hurt White. The pawn-thrust is not supported by pieces and its drawbacks become clear in a couple of moves...

24...gxf6 25 ♕h6 ♕g4 26 ♗e3

White could try 26 ♗xc5.

26...f5 27 ♕xd6

27 ♕g5+ offered some chances. The weak text-move is hopeless.

27...♘e6 28 ♖ae1 ♖c8 29 ♕d3 b4 30 ♖f3 h4 31 ♖ef1 ♖d8 32 ♕b5 f4 33 ♕b7 ♘g5 0-1

Double-edged play has always characterized the main lines of the Najdorf, which continue to inspire players after half a century of detailed exploration.

Minić – Fischer
Zagreb 1970
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♗e7

In those days Robert Fischer played various lines of the Najdorf with such impressive ease and excellence that a Yugoslav master once called him "the owner of the Najdorf". When the dark-squared bishop was cut off from the queenside by 7 f4, Fischer liked to respond 7...♕b6, but the solid text-move was also in his repertoire.

8 ♕f3 ♕c7

White vacates the first rank for queenside castling, and in reply Black prevents ♗c4, which would follow in case of the passive 8...♘bd7.

9 0-0-0 ♘bd7

After 9...♘c6 10 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 11 ♕g3 Black is more vulnerable on e5.

10 g4

White sets his kingside pawns in motion; this has been prepared by ♕f3 and 0-0-0.

10...b5

Black responds in kind.

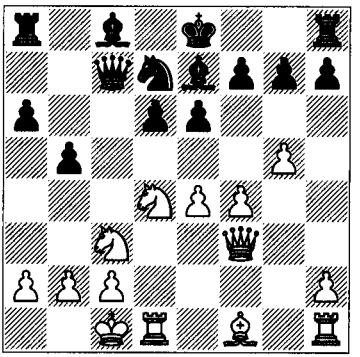
11 ♗xf6

The bishop is in the way and the exchange speeds up his pawn advance.

11...♘xf6

If Black replies 11...gxf6, denying White the possibility of advancing his g-pawn with tempo, then 12 f5 ♘e5 13 ♕h3 makes it difficult for the black king to find a safe refuge, while the manoeuvre ♘ce2-f4 could increase the pressure on the e6-pawn.

12 g5 ♘d7 *(D)*



13 a3

This is a key decision for White: he must decide whether to try to contain Black's counterplay with the text-move or invest further resources in the kingside attack with the pawn sacrifice 13 f5, which we discuss in the next game.

13...♖b8

Black should carry on what he started by 10...b5. Only this plan can balance White's massive pawn-storm on the other wing.

14 h4

Experience warns against the hasty 14 ♗h3. It is true that it pays off in case of the incautious 14...0-0, since 15 g6 hxg6 16 ♘xe6 fxe6 17 ♗xe6+ ♖f7 18 h4 gives White a strong attack, as in Reshevsky-Tringov, Interzonal tournament, Amsterdam 1964. However, 14...♘c5 15 ♖hg1 b4 16 axb4 ♖xb4 17 f5 ♕b7 is another story.

14...b4 15 axb4 ♖xb4

Note that Black has postponed castling in order to give his queenside counterplay all the time necessary.

16 ♗h3 0-0?!

At the time this was a novelty which spoilt White's preparations. Earlier, Black was afraid to castle due to 17 ♘xe6 fxe6 18 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 19 ♘d5; e.g., 19...♕b7 20 ♘xe7 or 19...♕a5 20 ♕c3, but looking for an explanation, Minić saw what his opponent had in mind: 19...♕c4. Some time was to pass until the Soviet masters Estrin and Gipslis looked further and found 20 ♗f5, which causes Black grave difficulties. For example: 20...♖xf5 (if 20...♘c5 then 21 ♘xe7 ♗xf5 22 ♘xf5) 21 exf5 ♗b7 22 ♖he1 ♗f8 23 ♖e8 ♔g8 24 ♖d8. The discovery caused Black to reassess the position and Lajos Portisch proposed 16...♕c5 17 ♘b3 ♕b6 in order to get rid of the constant menace to e6.

17 ♘f5?! ♘c5 18 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 19 h5?

In principle, the attacker should invest his resources primarily in his attack, but while keeping an eye on events on the other side of the board. Constant reappraisals are necessary after each move. It turns out that White has no time for moves like this, because his house is almost on fire and urgent defensive measures are necessary. 19 ♕e3 ♗b7 20 ♖d4 would lead to level play.

19...♗b7 20 h6 ♗xe4 21 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 22 hxg7 ♖c8

22...♔xg7 does not work due to 23 ♗f5 exf5 24 ♖xh7+, etc., but after the text-move 23 ♗f5 fails to 23...exf5 24 ♕h5 ♖xc2+! 25 ♔xc2 ♕c7+ 26 ♔b1 ♘c3+ 27 ♔c2 ♘xd1+ 28 ♔xd1 ♖d4+ and Black is quicker! The initiative has passed definitely to his side and

White is forced into passive defence without hope.

23 ♖h2 ♖a4 24 ♔b1 d5 25 c4

It is too late for White to attack. 25 ♗f5 loses to 25...exf5 26 ♕h3 ♘c3+ 27 bxc3 ♖a1+, etc.

25...♖axc4 26 ♗f1 ♖b4 27 ♕h3 ♘c3+ 28 ♔c1 ♘a4+ 29 ♔b1 ♖xb2+!

Black lands the final blow a step ahead of his opponent.

30 ♖xb2 ♘c3+ 31 ♔c1 ♕a3 32 ♗d3 ♕a1+ 33 ♔d2 ♕xb2+ 34 ♔e1 ♘e4 0-1

Psakhis – Y. Grünfeld

Israeli Team Ch 1996
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♗e7 8 ♕f3 ♕c7 9 0-0-0 ♘bd7 10 g4 b5 11 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 12 g5 ♘d7 13 f5

When it became apparent that 13 a3 slows down but does not prevent Black's initiative on the queenside, White threw himself in the attack by sacrificing a pawn. This decision is backed up by the position of the black king in the centre, the lack of coordination of the black pieces, and the open g-file White will get in return for the pawn. On the other hand, the strong e5-square is ceded to the d7-knight.

13...♗xg5+

The attempt to decline the offer by 13...♘c5 can be met by 14 f6 gxf6 15 gxf6 ♗f8 16 ♖g1, when the unavoidable idea of ♖g7 keeps Black under pressure. For example: 16...b4 17 ♘d5 exd5 18 exd5 ♗d7 19 ♖g7 and the extra piece means little.

14 ♔b1 ♘e5 15 ♕h5 ♕d8?!

I noticed that Van Wely played 15...♕e7 in a couple of games, and he may be right to consider it superior to the text-move. On e7 the queen will be exposed to ♘d5 later on, but e6 will be protected. Berelovich-Van Wely, Dieren 1999 continued 16 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 17 fxe6 g6 18 exf7+ ♔xf7 19 ♕h3 ♔g7 20 ♘d5 ♕d8 21 ♕g3 ♗h4 22 ♕c3 ♖a7 with level play.

16 h4

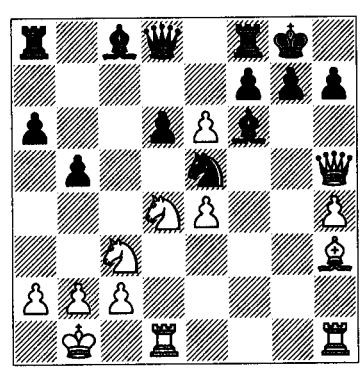
Earlier, in Psakhis-Cvitan, Geneva 1992, Psakhis had chosen 16 ♖g1 ♗f6 17 fxe6 but 17...0-0 18 ♗h3 g6 19 ♘d5 ♔h8 20 ♕e2 fxe6 21 ♗xe6 ♖a7 proved effective. On 16 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 17 fxe6 0-0 18 ♖g1 ♗f6 19 exf7+ Black held the balance by 19...♔h8 20 ♘d5 g6 21 ♕h3 ♖xf7 22 ♘f4 ♕d7 in Relange-Sadler, Hastings 1997/8. The text-move has one advantage over ♖g1: later, when ...g6 is provoked, h5 can be used to open up Black's damaged kingside completely.

16...♗f6 17 fxe6

17 ♘xe6 would lose to 17...g6.

17...0-0 18 ♗h3 *(D)*

B



18...♖e8?

I suppose Black wanted to provoke 19 exf7+ ♘xf7, which would suit him well, but he underrated 19 ♗f5, which is quite unpleasant and, what is worse, he overlooked the following tactical blow. The last edition of *ECO* recommends 18...fxe6 19 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 20 ♘d5 ♘c4, continuing 21 ♘xf6 ♕xf6 22 ♗d5 ♖b8 23 ♕g5 ♗d7. However, White strikes again by 21 ♘c6 ♕e8 22 ♕xe8 ♖xe8 23 ♘xf6 ♖xe6 24 ♘d5, when the threat of 25 ♘c7 cannot be parried. Since ...g6 is not appealing at any point for obvious reasons, Black will have to find something better or accept Van Wely's point of view.

19 ♘c6! ♕c7

After 19...g6 20 exf7+ ♘xf7 21 ♕e2 the black queen has no place to go.

20 ♘xe5

This move wins material, but 20 ♘d5 is even more difficult to meet. For example: 20...♕xc6 21 ♘xf6+ gxf6 22 ♕h6 ♗xe6 (22...♖a7 loses to 23 ♖dg1+ ♘g6 24 h5) 23 ♖dg1+ ♘g6 24 h5, etc.

20...♗xe5 21 ♘d5 ♕a7 22 exf7+ ♕xf7 23 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 24 ♘c7 ♗b7 25 ♗g2 b4

This move significantly complicates White's task.

26 ♖hf1+ ♔e7 27 h5

White underestimates the difficulties of realizing his advantage and plays thoughtlessly, losing precious time. Correct was 27 ♘xa8 ♗xa8 28 ♖d3 followed by 29 a3.

27...a5 28 ♖d2

28 ♘xa8 was still obviously stronger.

28...♖f8 29 ♘xa8 ♖xf1+ 30 ♗xf1 ♗xa8 31 ♖e2 ♗c6 32 ♗h3 ♗e8 33 ♗g4 g6 34 hxg6 ♗xg6 35 ♗f5

One would expect 35 ♖e3 followed by 36 a3.

35...♗xf5 36 exf5 ♔f6 37 ♖f2 h5 38 ♖f3 ♔g5 39 c3 bxc3 40 bxc3 h4?

40...d5 is correct.

41 ♔c2?

41 c4 ♔g4 42 ♖f1 ♗f6 43 ♔c2 wins by penetrating with the king to e6, and sacrificing the rook for the h-pawn.

41...♔g4?

I suspect this phase of the game was played in time-trouble. If Black had replied to White's error with 41...d5 42 ♔d3 ♔g4 43 ♖f1 ♗f6 44 c4 dxc4+ 45 ♔xc4 h3 46 ♔b5 h2 47 ♔xa5 ♔g3 48 ♔b5 ♔g2 49 ♖d1 ♗d4, the game would have ended in a draw.

42 ♖f1 ♔g5

42...♗f6 is too late due to 43 c4.

43 c4 h3 44 ♔d3 h2 45 ♔e4 ♔f6

45...♔g4 fails to 46 c5.

46 a4 ♗c3 47 ♔f4 ♗b2 48 ♔g3 ♗e5+ 49 ♔g2 ♔g5 50 f6 ♗xf6 51 ♔xh2 1-0

We also come across situations with an undefined centre and play on the wings in other lines of the Sicilian. Some time ago a game played in the Sveshnikov Variation attracted my attention...

Timman – Leko
Sarajevo 1999
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♘db5 d6 7 ♗f4 e5

8 ♗g5 a6 9 ♘a3 b5 10 ♗xf6 gxf6 11 ♘d5

In this popular variation, Black accepts doubled pawns on the f-file and a backward d6-pawn, and allows White to establish his knight on a strong central square. Despite all that, Black's position proves highly resilient and he tends to keep the balance.

11...f5 12 c3 ♗g7 13 exf5 ♗xf5 14 ♘c2 0-0 15 ♘ce3 ♗g6

This move leaves the trodden path: the bishop remains on the b1-h7 diagonal, defying earlier experience.

16 h4 ♗e4!?

Now that White has weakened his kingside, Black returns to e4. His intention is obvious – to meet 17 ♗d3 with 17...♗xd5 18 ♘xd5 f5, parrying potential threats to his king and expanding his influence.

17 h5 ♕g5 18 ♖h3

18 h6 ♗xh6 19 ♖h5 ♕g6 gives White nothing for the pawn, but after the text-move 19 h6 is threatened.

The newest attempt is 18 ♗e2 ♖a7 19 ♗f3 ♗xf3 20 ♕xf3 f5 21 h6, which gave White a temporary initiative in the game J.Polgar-Leko, Wijk aan Zee 2000.

18...♔h8 19 ♖g3

19 h6 again fails to produce positive results after 19...♗xh6 20 ♖g3 ♕d8 21 ♕h5 ♗xe3 22 ♘xe3 ♗g6.

19...♕h6 20 ♗d3

Commentators have passed over this moment. However, 20 ♘c7!?, with the idea of meeting 20...♖a7 with 21 ♕g4 f5 22 ♕xg7+ ♕xg7 23 ♖xg7, deserves attention.

20...♗xd5

The controversy is about the light squares d5 and f5. 20...♗xd3 21 ♕xd3 ♕xh5 would win a pawn, but endanger Black's chances after 22 ♕f5.

21 ♘f5

21 ♘xd5 f5 is obviously unappealing for White, but Timman had some tactical solutions in mind...

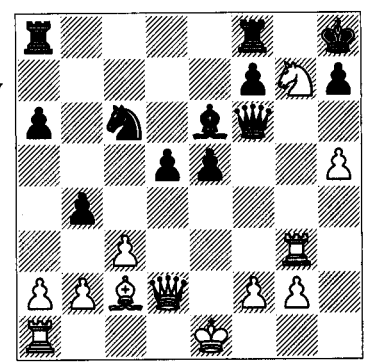
21...♕f6

21...♕f4 attracts me more.

22 ♗c2!

A subtle intermediary move. As long as the bishop is on d3, ...e4 is constantly in the air. So 22 h6 ♗xh6 23 ♕h5 fails to 23...e4 and 22 ♘xg7 e4 23 ♗xb5 ♘e7 suits Black. After the text-move, White will take on g7 in improved circumstances.

22...♗e6 23 ♘xg7 d5 24 ♕d2 b4! *(D)*



Once Black had seized space on the queenside in the early phase of the game, it could always be expected that he would later seek counterchances by opening the b-file. Given White's obvious intention to castle queenside, this counterplay is vital.

25 h6

25 0-0-0 bxc3 26 bxc3 ♖ab8 would turn the tables on White.

25...e4 26 ♘h5 ♕e5 27 ♖g5

27 ♕f4 is not convincing due to 27...f6.

27...f5 28 f4

With time-trouble approaching, this move, although good, could be considered somewhat risky.

28...exf3+ 29 ♔f2 ♕e2+

29...fxg2 is unnecessarily risky in view of 30 ♖e1.

30 ♕xe2 fxe2 31 ♖e1?!

A time-trouble error. The natural move 31 ♘f4 still forces Black to be watchful.

31...d4 32 ♖xe2 ♗c4 33 ♖e1 dxc3

Alternatively, 33...d3 34 ♗a4 ♗b5 35 ♗b3.

34 bxc3 bxc3 35 ♖g3 ♘d4 36 ♖xc3 ♗xa2 37 ♗d3 a5 38 ♖e7 ♗g8 39 ♖cc7 ♘e6 40 ♖a7 ♘c5 41 ♗b5 ♖fb8

Or 41...♖xa7 42 ♖xa7 ♖b8 43 ♗e2 a4 44 ♘f6.

42 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 43 ♘f6 ♘e4+ 44 ♘xe4 fxe4 45 ♖xe4 ½-½

The pawn advances, mostly by the rooks' and knights' pawns, that we have witnessed in these games aim to shatter the defensive wall around the enemy king and so to achieve a decisive superiority, or at least to seize a significant spatial advantage. Sometimes, however, the task set is not so high and it is entrusted to the bishop's (c- or f-) pawn. In the Richter-Rauzer or the Sozin, for instance, the charge the f-pawn carries out is partially of a positional nature.

Beliavsky – Kramnik
Linares 1994
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗g5

The first sign of White's intentions. The bishop on g5 will see to it that no counterplay in the centre is possible, while White starts to clear the way for queenside castling.

6...e6 7 ♕d2 ♗e7 8 0-0-0 0-0

Black fears neither 9 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 ♕xd6, when 11...♕b6 seizes the initiative, nor 9 ♘db5, when 9...♕a5 satisfies his aspirations. However, I remember a time when Black preferred 8...♘xd4 9 ♕xd4 0-0, because after the text-move White can avoid simplifications by 9 ♘b3, and it took Black some time to find the proper means of counterplay.

9 f4

The f-pawn is given the key role. By advancing to the fourth rank it broadens White's possibilities in the centre. There was no spare time anyway. 9 ♔b1, for example, could be answered by the simplifying 9...d5.

9...♘xd4 10 ♕xd4 ♕a5

This was also a moment of hesitation – whether to include 10...h6 11 ♗h4. We shall see that leaving the bishop on g5 makes it possible for Black to employ a crucial defensive manoeuvre.

11 ♗c4 ♗d7 12 ♖he1

Now 12 e5 is met by 12...dxe5 13 fxe5 ♗c6, when 14 exf6 is not available because the g5-bishop is hanging. Karpov used to like the continuation

all the same and continued 14 ♗d2 ♘d7 15 ♘d5 gaining the bishop-pair, but over the course of time White's advantage was shown to be too small. I was attracted by White's shrewd but faulty attempt 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♗d5 in J.Polgar-Kramnik, Linares 1994; the cold-blooded 15...f5 16 ♗xc6 bxc6 then repulsed her aggressive intentions.

12...♗c6

In Keres-Geller, Candidates tournament, Curaçao 1962, Black defended by 12...♖fd8 and after 13 ♗b3 b5 14 e5 dxe5 15 fxe5 b4 Geller's counterplay was timely. However, Kramnik's choice is more natural.

13 f5

This move is consistent with White's basic ideas and is in harmony with the activity of the c4-bishop. White aims to provoke 13...e5, weakening Black's control of the d5-square and the light-square diagonal a2-g8. If that task is fulfilled, then the conditions will be right for a kingside pawn-storm.

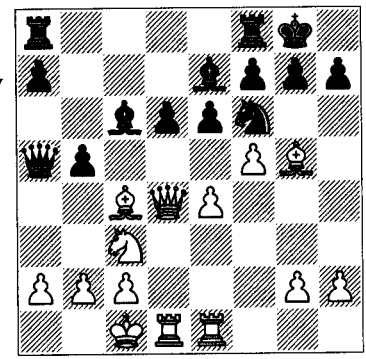
Note that the attractive 13 ♘d5 does not work due to 13...♘xd5 14 exd5 e5 followed by 15...♗xg5 16 fxg5 ♗d7.

13...b5 *(D)*

A quick and energetic response. The forces which are supposed to control the d5-square, the c4-bishop and the c3-knight, will be driven away. 13...exf5 14 exf5 ♕xf5 15 ♕h4 h6 16 ♗xh6 ♘e4 17 ♕xe7 ♘xc3 18 ♖f1 is less healthy for Black.

14 ♗b3 b4 15 ♘e2 ♗a4

Giving way in the centre by 15...e5 fully justifies White's advance f4-f5, while 15...d5 proves faulty in view of



16 fxe6 fxe6 17 ♕e5. By exchanging the light-squared bishops, Black hopes to eliminate White's pressure in the centre.

16 ♔b1

16 ♕d3 is more difficult to meet. For example: 16...exf5 17 ♘g3 fxe4 18 ♘xe4.

16...♗xb3 17 axb3 ♖fc8

Threatening ...♖c6-a6, but 17...♖ac8 looks more natural.

18 ♗d2?

The retreat means a change of fortunes. After 18 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 19 ♕xd6 there is again the planned 19...♖xc2 20 ♔xc2 ♖c8+ 21 ♔b1 ♗xb2 22 ♔xb2 ♕a3+ with perpetual check, a result to which White should acquiesce.

18...♕c7 19 ♕d3

After 19 ♖c1 e5 20 ♕d3 ♕b7 21 ♘g3 h6 Black will attack by ...a5, while White's activity is grounded with no hope of reviving it soon.

19...exf5 20 exf5 d5 21 ♗f4

Other continuations run into the same problem: White has no way to oppose the assault on his king by the advance of Black's a-pawn.

21...♗d6 22 g3 a5 23 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 24 ♘f4 a4 25 bxa4

25 ♘xd5 is insufficient owing to the reply 25...♘xd5 26 ♕xd5 ♕c7 27 ♕c4 ♕a7.

25...♖xa4 26 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 27 ♕xd5

27 ♕b5 ♖aa8 28 ♖xd5 ♕c7 does not change the outcome.

27...♕c7 28 ♕e4 ♖aa8 29 ♖d4 ♕a5 30 ♔c1 b3 31 c4

Or 31 c3 ♕a1+ 32 ♕b1 ♖xc3+, etc.

31...♕b4 0-1

The *quietus*. 32 ♔b1 would be in vain due to 32...♕a4 33 ♔c1 ♖e8.

Adams – San Segundo

Madrid 1996

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 ♕d2 a6

With this move Black postpones kingside development so as to prioritize queenside play.

8 0-0-0 h6 9 ♗e3 ♘xd4

This exchange makes it possible for Black to continue 10...b5. Note that 9...♘g4 stumbles into 10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 ♗c5.

10 ♗xd4 b5 11 f4 ♗e7

In a game between two computers there followed 11...♗b7 12 ♕e3 b4 13 ♗xf6 and after 13...♕xf6 White missed the crushing 14 ♘b5, but 13...gxf6 14 ♘a4 ♕a5 is playable.

12 ♕e3 ♗b7

At this delicate moment, there are a few alternatives:

a) 12...♗d7 is poor in view of 13 e5 dxe5 14 fxe5 ♘d5 15 ♘xd5 exd5 16 ♕g3 ♗f8 17 h4.

b) 12...b4 13 ♘a4 ♕c7 (the immediate 13...♖b8 is better) 14 ♘b6 ♖b8 15 ♘c4 ♕c6 16 e5 dxe5 17 ♗xe5 ♖a8 18 ♘d6+ favoured White in Svidler-Ma.Tseitlin, St Petersburg 1997.

c) 12...♕c7 runs into 13 e5 dxe5 14 fxe5 (14 ♗xe5 was met successfully by 14...♘g4 in Ivanchuk-Kramnik, Dos Hermanas 1996) 14...♘d7 15 ♘e4 ♗b7 16 ♘d6+, when White has the initiative.

The text-move prevents the central thrust e5, but runs into another problem...

13 ♗xf6 gxf6

13...♗xf6 is dubious due to 14 e5 ♗e7 15 exd6 ♗xd6 16 ♘e4 ♗xe4 17 ♕xe4 0-0 18 ♗d3 g6 and the fact that ...h6 was included now hurts Black; after 19 h4 ♕f6 20 ♖df1 he falls under attack.

14 ♗d3 ♕a5

Black can also play 14...♕c7, avoiding a weakening of his queenside formation. White then faces a choice between 15 f5 ♕c5 16 ♕g3 and the somewhat slower but quite interesting 15 ♔b1 0-0-0 16 f5 ♕c5 17 ♕h3 ♕e5. In Vydeslaver-A.Greenfeld, Beersheba 1996, White continued 18 fxe6 fxe6 19 a4.

15 ♔b1 b4 16 ♘e2 ♕c5 17 ♘d4

Given that White has not played f5, 17 ♕g3 threatens nothing (17...0-0-0 18 ♕g7 ♖df8).

17...♗c6

This is not an easy position for Black to defend. Other moves:

a) In case of 17...0-0-0, 18 c3 is quite unpleasant (18...bxc3 or 18...e5 comes across 19 ♖c1).

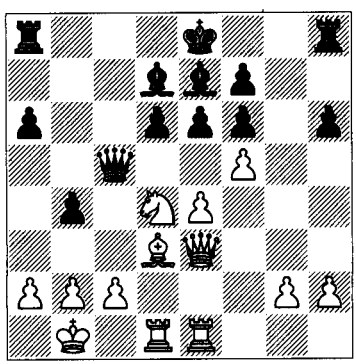
b) In the later game Adams-Serper, New York 1996, Black tried 17...h5 18 ♕e2 a5 19 ♗b5+ ♔f8, but after the clever 20 ♗c4 (threatening ♗xe6) 20...♕b6 21 g4 hxg4 22 ♕xg4 Black's refuge on f8 proved inadequate.

c) Although 17...e5 18 ♘f5 ♕xe3 19 ♘xe3 exf4 might look satisfactory, 20 ♘d5 ♗xd5 21 exd5 is a difficult endgame for Black due to his shattered pawn-structure.

Therefore, Black improves the position of his light-squared bishop.

18 ♖he1 ♗d7 19 f5! *(D)*

B



Slowly but consistently, the f-pawn has reached its destination, increasing the pressure on e6. In the meantime the position has remained closed and thus unappealing to the black bishop-pair.

19...e5 20 ♘b3 ♕xe3 21 ♖xe3 ♖g8 22 g3 a5 23 ♗c4 a4 24 ♘c1

White's basic intentions have been realized. The d5-square is reserved for the c4-bishop, while the position of the c1-knight will be easily improved.

24...♗c6 25 ♗d5 ♖c8 26 b3

The black pawns on the queenside are now subjected to pressure.

26...♗d8

A plausible move. Instead, 26...a3 would mean resignation. After 27 c3 the knight will come out and eventually the a3-pawn would fall as well. 26...axb3 27 axb3 vacates the a2-square for the knight with similar consequences.

27 ♗xc6+ ♖xc6 28 bxa4 ♔e7 29 ♖d5 ♗b6

29...♖a6 is weak due to 30 ♖b5, while 29...♖c4 30 a5 is not a pleasure for Black either.

30 ♖b3 ♗c5

30...♖c4 31 a3 ♖xe4 32 ♖xb4 ♖xb4+ 33 axb4 is obviously good for White.

31 ♘d3 ♖a8

If 31...♖g4, then 32 ♘xc5 ♖xc5 (or 32...dxc5 33 ♖e3) 33 ♖xc5 dxc5 34 ♖e3 follows; 32 ♘xb4 ♖c8 33 ♖d1 ♖xe4 34 ♘d5+ followed by 35 ♘xf6 is also advantageous to White.

32 ♘xb4 ♖c7?

This helps White but defending a miserable position is always psychologically difficult. 32...♖cc8 is better.

33 ♖dd3 ♖xa4 34 ♘d5+ ♔d7 35 ♘xf6+ ♔c6 36 a3 ♖ca7 37 ♔a2 ♖c4 38 ♖bc3 ♖ca4 39 g4 ♖b7 40 h4 ♖bb4 41 g5 hxg5 42 hxg5 ♖xe4 43 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 44 g6 fxg6 45 fxg6 1-0

Am. Rodriguez – Kožul
World Team Ch, Lucerne 1997
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 ♕d2 a6 8 0-0-0 ♗d7

If you analysed the previous game attentively, then developing the bishop to d7 will be easier to understand: it will support the pawn advance on the queenside and later on it will support the e6-pawn against the f5-pawn.

9 f4 b5 10 ♗xf6

Doubling Black's pawns on the f-file is in harmony with White's plan to advance his f-pawn.

10...gxf6

Note that 10...♕xf6 is met by the somewhat unpleasant 11 e5 dxe5 12 ♘dxb5.

11 ♘xc6

This also fits in with White's plans, but I would like to say a little about the waiting 11 ♔b1 ♕b6 12 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 13 ♕e1:

a) White is able to meet 13...b4 by 14 ♘d5.

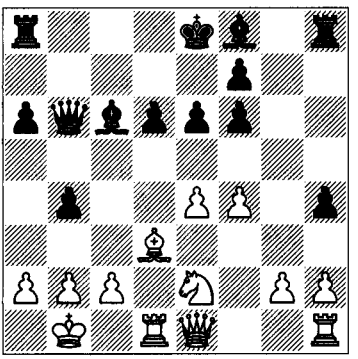
b) 13...♖a7 14 f5 b4 15 ♘e2 e5 16 ♘g3 ♕c5 (or else ♗c4) 17 ♘h5 ♗e7 18 ♕h4 is advantageous for White, I.Gurevich-Kožul, Interzonal tournament, Biel 1993.

c) 13...♗e7 14 ♗d3 a5 (14...h5 is critical) 15 f5 b4 16 ♘e2 e5 17 ♘g3 ♕c5 18 ♕e2 ♖c8 19 b3 0-0 20 ♗c4 is also good for White, Adams-Kožul, Belgrade 1998. The pressure created by the f-pawn caused a weakness on d5, which White was able to exploit.

11...♗xc6 12 ♗d3 b4 13 ♘e2 ♕b6 14 ♔b1 h5 15 ♕e1 h4 *(D)*

Earlier Kožul played 15...a5 but came to the conclusion that the queen should not be allowed to h4, even if the h4-pawn does now become exposed.

16 ♖f1 a5 17 f5



17 ♖f3 would provoke the unpleasant 17...f5 18 ♘c1 ♗g7, but the text-move comes somewhat late. 17 ♘g1 comes into consideration, improving the position of the passive knight.

17...e5 18 ♗c4?

Black's reply demonstrates why this move is bad.

18...♕e3

Of course, after 18...♗xe4? 19 ♘f4 ♗b7 20 ♗d5 the knight will eventually master the scene from its inaccessible stronghold at d5.

19 ♗d5 ♗xd5 20 exd5 ♖g8 21 ♖f3 ♕e4 22 ♕f2 ♖c8

Everything has suddenly changed. Black dominates the open files and possesses a superior bishop, while White has to worry about his weak pawns on d5 and f5.

23 ♘c1 ♗h6 24 g3

After the game Kožul demonstrated 24 ♘b3 a4 25 ♘a5 ♖c5 26 ♘b7 ♖xd5 27 ♘xd6+ ♖xd6 28 ♖xd6 ♖xg2!. Then 29 ♖fd3 does not help White due to 29...♕xd3, while 29 ♖d8+ ♔xd8 30 ♕b6+ ♔e8 does not lead to perpetual check.

24...hxg3 25 hxg3 ♖c5 26 ♖fd3 ♗xc1

The bishop is not needed any more.

27 ♖xc1 ♖g5 28 ♖f1 ♖xd5 29 ♕b6

In a lost position White has a little trap in mind.

29...♖xd3 30 ♕b5+ ♔f8 31 cxd3 ♕e2 32 ♖c1

32 ♖h1 is parried by 32...♖h5.

With the text-move, Black is given a chance to grab the other pawn by 32...♖xg3?, when the trap springs: 33 ♕b8+ ♔g7 34 ♖h1 ♕xd3+ 35 ♔a1 ♖h3 36 ♖g1+ and draw is saved! This is to remind the reader that the board is strewn with mines waiting for us to step on them right up until the moment the scoresheet is signed.

32...♖xf5 0-1

Anand – Piket

Amsterdam 1990

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗c4

It is almost half a century since this move of the Soviet master Sozin first came into fashion. White has two main intentions. Firstly, the bishop will reinforce White's queenside defences, while on the a2-g8 diagonal it will exert powerful pressure on the e6-pawn in harmony with the advance of the f-pawn. If White can provoke the move ...e5, then his pieces may well be able to take advantage of this crevice in the black pawn-wall.

6...e6 7 ♗e3 a6 8 ♗b3 ♗e7

There is a school of thought that the Sozin bishop should be eliminated as soon as possible; those who subscribe to it play 8...♘a5 9 f4 ♕c7 10 f5 e5 11 ♘de2 ♘xb3. Others believe that this is not necessary and calmly continue 8...♕c7 9 f4 ♗e7 10 ♕f3 ♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 b5 12 f5 e5 13 ♗f2 ♗b7 14 0-0-0 b4 15 ♘d5 ♘xd5 16 ♗xd5 0-0, relying on ...a5-a4 to generate queenside counterplay.

In the beginning, however, most attention was given to a somewhat different move-order – 2...d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 ♗b3 b5 8 f4 ♗b7 (that 8...b4 9 ♘a4 ♘xe4 is dubious became apparent after the game Fischer-Tal, Candidates tournament, Belgrade 1959) 9 f5 e5 10 ♘de2 ♘bd7 (10...♘xe4 was quickly abandoned due to 11 ♗d5). Although White has realized his strategic ambitions, he has little to show on the positive side of the scales. On the contrary, he has to worry about Black's counterplay on the c-file (...♖c8xc3) and the long-term vulnerability of the e4-pawn.

9 f4 0-0 10 ♕f3 ♕c7 11 0-0-0 b5 12 g4 ♘xd4 13 ♖xd4 *(D)*

After 13 ♗xd4 b4 14 ♘a4 ♗b7 there is counter-pressure on the e4-pawn, which the text-move seeks to avoid.

By preventing 13...b4, speculated White, he could spare a moment of relief to play g5 and seize the initiative. However, the position of the rook in the middle of the board is sensitive and Black can try to make use of it.

13...b4

The game is again about how to win time. After the text-move, Black will eventually lose a pawn and have to fight for his life. Black would not accept

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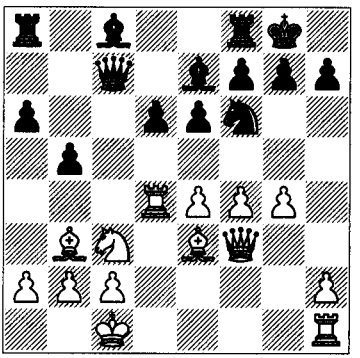


this role in the game Reinderman-Kasparov, Wijk aan Zee 1999; he opted for 13...e5 14 ♘d5 ♘xd5 15 ♖xd5 b4 (15...exf4 16 ♗xf4 ♗e6 17 ♖d2 favours White and 15...♗e6 16 f5 ♗xd5 17 ♗xd5 even more so) 16 f5 a5 and here Black was defending a good cause. After 17 ♗a4 (17 ♖d2 a4 18 ♗d5 ♗b7 satisfies Black) 17...♗b7 18 g5 ♖fc8, with 19...b3 hanging in the air, he seized the initiative.

14 ♖xb4 d5 15 ♖d4 dxe4 16 ♕e2 a5!

The e4-pawn is a hopeless case. Black must create counterplay on the queenside. The task is given to the a-pawn, which will soon get fresh support after the manoeuvre ...♘d7-b6.

17 g5 ♘d7 18 ♘xe4 ♘b6 19 a4

This weakens the king's defences, but 19 a3 does the same.

19...♗a6 20 ♕f2 ♗c4 21 ♗xc4 ♘xc4 22 b3 ♘xe3 23 ♕xe3 e5

White is weak on the dark squares and Black possesses a dark-squared bishop. It is easily understandable that he aims to open the position for his bishop as much as possible.

24 ♖c4 ♗a3+

A different move-order, 24...exf4 25 ♖xc7 ♗a3+, would allow 26 ♔d2, which makes a huge difference.

25 ♔b1 exf4 26 ♖xc7 fxe3 27 ♖e1

27 ♖c3 is worse due to 27...♖fe8 28 ♖xe3 ♗b4, threatening (apart from 29...♗d2 followed by 30...♗xg5) to double rooks and keep the white pieces pinned.

27...♖fe8 28 ♖c4 h6?

Before White grabs the pawn at e3 there is no pin and freeing the f-pawn at the cost of a healthy pawn is suicidal. 28...♖e6 followed by 29...♖ae8 was an indispensable first step.

29 ♔a2 ♗f8 30 gxh6 f5 31 hxg7 ♗xg7 32 ♘d6 ♖e5 33 ♖f4?

33 ♖c7! wins; e.g., 33...e2 34 ♖g1 e1♕ 35 ♖cxg7+ and mate next move or 33...♖d8 34 ♘c4, etc.

33...♖d8

Black's only chance is White's weak back rank.

34 ♘c4 ♖e7 35 ♖xe3 ♖d1 36 c3 ♗xc3

This makes it simple. Correct was 36...♖xe3 37 ♘xe3 ♖d2+ 38 ♔b1 (but not 38 ♔a3 ♗f8+) 38...♗xc3 39 ♘c4 ♖xh2 although 40 ♖xf5 announces the fall of the a5-pawn and a slow win.

37 ♖xc3 ♖e2+ 38 ♘b2 ♖dd2 39 ♖g3+ 1-0

Fischer – Geller

Skopje 1967

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 ♗e3 ♗e7 8 ♗b3 0-0

Experience has shown that Black does best to delay castling and invest the tempo in his queenside attack: 8...a6 9 ♕e2 ♕c7 10 0-0-0 ♘a5 11 g4 b5 12 g5 ♘xb3+ 13 axb3 ♘d7.

9 ♕e2

The move leads to the kind of "irresponsible Sicilian positions", as an old master called them, where it was not clear who was quicker and which side had a trump-card up his sleeve. Fischer liked it though. In the first place, it is natural and logical, as the queen move prepares queenside castling and keeps an eye on the g4-square (against ...♘g4) and the c4-square (against ...♘a5-c4). Besides, in general it was Fischer himself who regularly found a trump-card at a critical moment of the struggle.

9...♕a5?!

One has doubts not only about this move, but about the move-order chosen. Black's queenside pawn advance, which is vital for the dynamic balance, needs to come more quickly.

10 0-0-0 ♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 ♗d7

Grabbing a pawn by 11...♕g5+ 12 ♔b1 ♕xg2 cedes all the initiative to White. 13 ♖hg1 ♕h3 14 e5 is perilous for Black.

12 ♔b1 ♗c6

When a couple of rounds later the Macedonian master Sofrevski was scheduled to meet Fischer with Black, Geller, disregarding the unwritten codex of behaviour, prepared Sofrevski for the game. His help, however, brought upon Sofrevski's head the deserved catastrophe. His 12...♖ad8 was called into question at once by the strong 13 ♕e3. Seeing that 13...b5 14 a3 b4 15 axb4 ♕xb4 16 ♗xa7 ♖a8 17 ♕b6 loses material without compensation, Black played 13...b6 and was struck by 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♘d5, losing a healthy pawn because 15...exd5 16 ♖xd5 followed by 17 ♖h5 brings the worst. On move 19 (!) Sofrevski resigned and Geller's scheme was torpedoed.

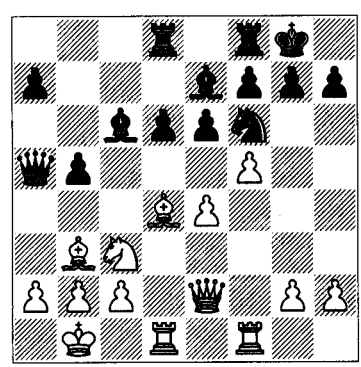
13 f4 ♖ad8

In case of 13...e5 14 ♗e3 exf4 (14...♘xe4 loses to 15 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 16 ♗d2) 15 ♗xf4, the d6-pawn is under pressure and White's bishop-pair very active and strong.

14 ♖hf1 b5

After 14...d5 15 e5 ♘e4 Fischer had in mind 16 f5 keeping the edge. (He liked the word and what it meant. During an evening walk around the Rovinj island where we played the tournament in 1970, speaking of sharp positions he said: "It is the edge that matters!")

15 f5! *(D)*



15...b4 16 fxe6 bxc3 17 exf7+ ♔h8 18 ♖f5

It takes a great player to find his hidden chances in a piece sacrifice of this kind.

18...♕b4

Fischer had in mind 18...♕c7 19 ♖df1 ♘d7 (White was threatening ♖xf6) 20 ♖h5, when the black king lays mortally exposed, but he was not sure how to continue after the text-move, and he now spent three quarters of an hour on his next move. Some decisions must be taken relying on intuition rather than on sheer calculation. Without it we would be deprived of many brilliant games.

19 ♕f1!

This renews the threat of 20 ♖xf6.

19...♘xe4

After the slow 19...♘d7, Fischer demonstrated 20 ♖h5 ♘e5 21 ♕f5 h6 22 ♕g6. He considered 19...♘g4 to be best. Then 20 ♗xc3 ♕b7 21 ♕f4 ♘e5 22 ♖e1 threatens 23 ♖xe5 dxe5 24 ♕xe5.

20 a3?

Who would predict that this move loses? Fischer confessed that he only found the winning move some hours after the game. It was 20 ♕f4!. I can only record his analysis: 20...cxb2 (20...d5 loses to 21 ♕e5 ♘f6 22 ♖xf6, etc., and 20...♘d2+ loses to 21 ♖xd2 cxd2 22 c3 ♕xb3 23 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 24 ♕g4+ ♔h8 25 ♕d4+) 21 ♖h5! ♘c3+ (or 21...♗f6 22 ♕f5 h6 23 ♖xh6+ gxh6 24 ♕g6) 22 ♔xb2 ♘xd1+ (or 22...♖xf7 23 ♕xf7 ♘xd1+ 24 ♔b1 ♕xd4 25 ♖xh7+ ♔xh7 26 ♕h5#) 23 ♔c1 ♖xf7 24 ♗xf7 and the threats cannot be parried any longer.

20...♕b7 21 ♕f4 ♗a4!

The hidden crushing response that White had overlooked!

22 ♕g4 ♗f6 23 ♖xf6 ♗xb3 0-1

24...♗a2+ is hanging over White's head and nothing can be done to repair the damage made by the incautious 20 a3, which fatally weakened his queenside. There is no point White bothering with 24 cxb3 ♘xf6.

A memorable game indeed, and a memorable warning too. It is not the only game in our selection which was decided or spoilt by grave errors. On the contrary, we find this happening in a great many games with opposite-wing attacks. We often had a chance to speak of a sudden lapse of concentration and similar explanations. Generally speaking, the real reason is in my opinion deeper. The type of positions we are discussing, in which the element of time plays such an important role and options are so numerous, concealed and treacherous, the unique narrow path is often difficult to find. Time is consumed quickly (the great Fischer spent a whole hour deliberating his idea started with 14 ♖hf1 and resulting in a won position after 19 ♕f1) and tensions rise quickly with the approach of time-trouble. We have to bear in mind that in chess, time is not what the clock shows, but what the players feel. Nearing the end of the allotted time, the clock-hands seem to move much more quickly than at the start of the game. In such moments of tension the chessboard becomes a minefield to be crossed without a map.

In this section we have so far concentrated on the Sicilian minefield

because it provides excellent examples of the general problems arising when the central situation is unstable and the players attack on opposite wings. However, we also encounter these same tense and unpredictable situations in other openings.

Kasparov – Svidler
Wijk aan Zee 1999
Grünfeld Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 ♕b3

Black's counterplay in the Grünfeld is very often based on the side-blow ...c5, which in harmony with the fianchettoed bishop exerts strong pressure on the pawn-centre. The text-move, provoking either 5...c6 or 5...dxc4, is directed against that strategic plan.

5...dxc4 6 ♕xc4 0-0 7 e4 a6

The most consistent move for Black is 7...♘a6, preparing ...c5, which came into fashion following the matches between Karpov and Kasparov. In the late 1960s, Hungarian grandmasters popularized the text-move. Its intention is to seize space on the queenside. For the time being let us just note that 8 a4 does not stop 8...b5 and that other steps are therefore necessary.

8 e5

The quiet 8 ♗e2 is met energetically by 8...b5 9 ♕b3 c5. Kasparov-Leko, Linares 1999 continued 10 dxc5 ♗b7 (the most effective; 10...♘c6 11 ♗e3 b4 12 ♘a4 ♘xe4 13 0-0 favours White) 11 0-0 (11 e5 is answered by 11...♘d5 12 0-0 ♘d7) 11...♘xe4 12 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 13 ♗g5 (13 ♗e3 comes into consideration) 13...♘c6 (but not 13...h6 due to 14 ♕e3) 14 ♕e3 ♕d5 with level play.

8...b5 9 ♕b3 ♘fd7 10 e6

10 ♗e3 does not dissuade Black from 10...c5, when 11 e6 c4 led to good counterplay for Black in Piket-J.Polgar, Linares 1997.

10...fxe6 11 ♗e3

In the early days of exploration, 10 e6 was connected with 11 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 12 ♕e4, but after 12...♘b6 13 ♗f4 ♘c6 Adorjan concluded that Black was OK. The continuation 11 ♘g5 ♘b6 12 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 13 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 14 ♗e3 ♖f6 15 ♕e4 ♖d6 added to the impression. Kasparov, however, is not in a hurry to re-establish material equality: his target is the black kingside, weakened by the pawn sacrifice.

11...♘b6?!

The kingside is more vulnerable than Black realizes and the knight should move to f6 to strengthen it. After 11...♘f6 12 a4 bxa4 13 ♖xa4 ♘d5 14 ♗c4 c6 Black is somewhat passive but solid.

12 h4 *(D)*

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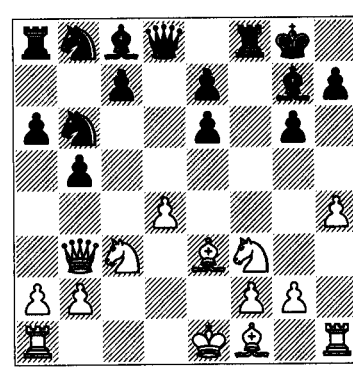

Feeling that his king is secure in the centre, White has good reasons to launch this pawn attack. His opponent is behind in development and in the meantime his initial activity on the queenside has lost its meaning.

12...♘c6 13 h5 ♖xf3

Something must be done against the growing pressure. The alternative 13...♘xd4 14 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 15 0-0-0 ♗xe3+ 16 fxe3 ♕e8 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 ♕b4 was not to Svidler's liking: his king's refuge looks insecure.

14 gxf3 ♘xd4 15 ♖d1 c5

15...♘xf3+ 16 ♔e2 ♘d4+ fails to 17 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 ♕c2.

16 ♗xd4 cxd4

Or 16...♗xd4 17 ♘e2.

17 hxg6 h6

Keeping the position as closed as possible. 17...hxg6 18 ♕c2 ♕e8 19 ♗d3 does not inspire confidence.

18 ♖h5!

The crucial decision of the struggle: the b6-knight is kept out of d5.

18...♕e8 19 ♘e2 ♕xg6 20 ♖h1

So at the cost of a tempo and a pawn White has opened the g-file, giving his initiative realistic form. From now on, the defence of what is left of Black's kingside will be difficult.

20...♔h8 21 ♖g1 ♕f7

In case of 21...♕h5 22 f4 ♘d5 23 ♕g3 ♕f7 24 ♗g2 Black's defensive difficulties remain.

22 ♘xd4 ♘d5 23 ♕d3

The queen moves into an attacking position.

23...♗d7

Black's problems are not alleviated by 23...♘f6 24 ♕e3, 23...♘f4 24 ♕e4 (if 24...♖b8 then 25 ♖xg7) or 23...e5 24 ♘c6.

24 ♕e4 ♖c8 25 ♗d3 ♘f6 26 ♕h4 ♖c5?

This appears to be a useful defensive move, but as a matter of fact there is little that the rook can do on its fourth rank. Black's basic problem lies with the hole on g6. Therefore, 26...♘d5 was indispensable, making possible either ...♘f4 or ...♕f4.

27 ♘e2 ♘d5 28 ♖g6

White threatens 29 ♖xh6+ ♗xh6 30 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 31 ♔d2, and Black has no good defence.

28...♕f8 29 ♕e4 ♕f7 30 ♔d2 ♘f6 31 ♕e3 1-0

Sakaev – Kobaliya

Russian Ch, St Petersburg 1998
Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 c4 c6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗h4 dxc4

Logical and consistent. 6...g5 7 ♗g3 ♘e4 is too optimistic, as is shown, for instance, by the simple 8 e3 ♗b4 9 ♕b3.

7 e4

By creating a large pawn-centre, White provokes 7...g5, which weakens Black's kingside pawn-structure, though in return the e4-pawn will now be vulnerable. These two motifs will intertwine in our assessments of the resulting positions.

7...g5 8 ♗g3 b5 9 ♗e2

Having sacrificed a pawn, White seeks compensation in the form of superior development. In I.Sokolov-Novikov, Ubeda 1997, White was less

patient and continued 9 h4 g4 10 ♘e5 h5 (10...♗b4 would be neutralized by 11 f3) 11 ♗e2 and after 11...♗b7 12 0-0 ♘bd7 (if 12...♗g7, 13 b3 is strong) 13 ♕c2 ♗g7 14 ♖ad1 ♕b6 15 ♘a4 ♕a5 16 ♘c5 he had the initiative. The question remains what happens after 11...b4 12 ♘a4 ♘xe4.

With ...b4 on his mind, an old Soviet master (whose name, truth to say, I do not recall) used to play 9 ♘e5 at once (without h4 and ...g4 included, the squares f3 and h5 are available to the queen and the light-squared bishop). After 9...♗b7 10 ♗e2, 10...♘bd7 11 h4 gives White good compensation due to his initiative. Instead, 10...♗g7 transposes to Timman-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1998, which favoured White after 11 h4 ♘fd7?! 12 ♘g4!.

9...b4

9...♗b4 is another attempt to make use of the weakness of the e4-pawn, but in Yusupov-Akopian, Ubeda 1997, 10 0-0 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 ♘xe4 12 ♘e5 demonstrated that Black's stomach would not bear gobbling up new material: 12...♘xc3 13 ♕c2 ♘xe2+ (worse is 13...♕xd4 14 ♗h5 0-0 15 ♖ad1 ♘xd1 16 ♖xd1 and 17 ♘xf7 cannot be averted) 14 ♕xe2 exposes Black to attack. Even the cautious 12...♘d7, as played in the game, gave White the initiative after 13 ♗h5 0-0 14 ♘xf7 ♖xf7 15 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 16 ♕c2.

The unassuming 9...♗b7 10 0-0 ♘bd7 has attracted more followers.

10 ♘a4 ♘xe4 11 ♗e5

The mild 11 ♗xc4 ♘xg3 12 hxg3 ♘d7 13 0-0 ♗g7 gave White little in Korchnoi-Timman, Wijk aan Zee 1997.

11...♘f6 12 ♘c5!

In case of 12 0-0 White does not like 12...♘bd7.

12...♗g7

After 12...♗xc5 13 dxc5 Black will have to worry about the dark squares, while 12...♘bd7 can now be met by 13 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 14 ♗xc4 with good play.

13 ♗xc4 0-0?

Out of the frying pan and into the fire!

14 ♕c2 ♘bd7 15 h4! *(D)*

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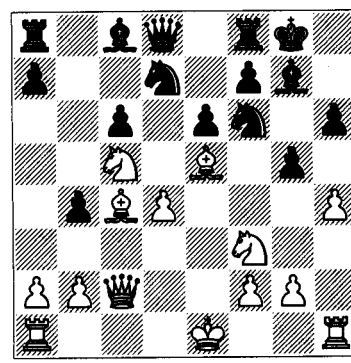


One should be careful when advancing pawns, because each pawn advance creates a potential weakness. Black has expanded on both wings, and neglected his development. White, on the other hand, has been accumulating strength by harmonious development, and now strikes at the exposed black pawn-formation.

15...gxh4

15...g4 16 ♘g5 would reveal the point of White's 14th move.

16 ♘xd7

The e5-bishop is too precious to part with.

16...♗xd7 17 ♖xh4 ♘d5 18 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 19 ♖g4+ ♔h8 20 ♕d2 ♕f6 21 ♘e5 ♗e8 22 0-0-0

Black's kingside has been irreparably damaged and the attacking forces prevail.

22...♘e7 23 ♖h1 ♘g8 24 ♖gh4 ♔g7 25 ♖f4 1-0

After 25...♕d8, 26 ♖g4+ followed by 27 ♖xg8 decides.

Looking back at the last two games we note that in both it was Black who acted first. His pawns seized a spatial advantage on the wings in the opening phase. White, on the contrary, was biding his time with his king in the centre, which took the sting out of the wing advances. When White finally reacted and launched his h-pawn into the attack, Svidler's initiative on the queenside had petered out and Kobaliya's aggressive advance on the other side proved an easy target. White struck relatively late in the game and his patience paid off. We have often emphasized in our analysis that time matters and that acting quickly generally bears fruit. In general it does, but only if some meaningful results are obtained by doing so. If the pawns are halted, if they create no threats, if new possibilities are not opened by the pawn advance, then they reveal their other, weak side and facilitate the opponent's counter-attack.

The Need to Act

When speaking of the dynamic centre and dynamic pawn-structures we have emphasized the initiative, pawn advances, attacks and counter-attacks, and the precious value of time. At the end of the chapter, we reach a pertinent question I have been often asked when teaching chess: why do we have to fight for the initiative, entering all these treacherous positions in which every single step can bring about disaster? Why all this frantic effort in troubled waters? Why don't we just 'maintain our position', staying in clear waters and relative security?

Well, the answer is quite simple: in positions with a dynamic centre there are no clear waters and no relative security. While symmetrical pawn-structures mean peace and harmony, asymmetric formations imply tension and struggle. One either takes his chance in seizing the initiative or else cedes the initiative to the opponent. The moment a player loses the initiative, he is, in most cases, on his irredeemable way to defeat. That is a straight answer, but practical analysis and comparison will be more convincing. We shall examine a couple of delicate positions characterized by the hedgehog pawn-structure and see what fortune they can offer.

Uhlmann – Ljubojević
Amsterdam 1975
English Opening

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 e6 4 g3 b6 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♕xd4 a6 8 0-0 d6

White has obtained a spatial advantage and his strength in the centre will

be increased by the expected advance e4. Black has arranged his pieces on the last three ranks, but with a firm, flexible row of pawns on their third rank controlling all the relevant squares.

9 b3 ♘bd7 10 ♗b2 ♗e7 11 ♖fd1 0-0 12 e4

White has outlined his plan: to control the centre fully and prevent any tactical counterblow. His power in the centre looks formidable. However, I have a couple of initial remarks: I do not think that the fianchettoed dark-squared bishop is happily placed and I do not feel that 11 ♖fd1 was a fortunate choice.

12...♕b8

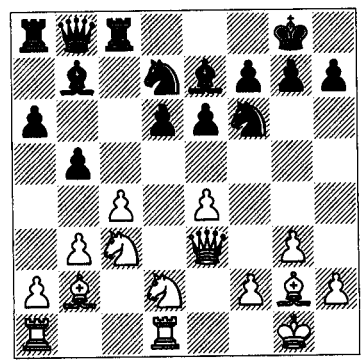
The b8-square is a fine place for the queen, but 12...♕c7, first introducing the queen's rook into play, looks more natural. 13 ♕e3 ♖fe8 14 ♘d4 ♗f8 15 ♖ac1 ♖ad8 16 h3 g6 17 ♔h2 ♗g7 18 ♕e2 ♕b8 transposes to Vukić-Suba, Vinkovci 1977. White's knights make sure there will be no surprises with ...b5, but having placed his king's rook at e8, opposing the white queen, Black is ready to strike in the centre by ...d5. The plan of 13 ♕e3 followed by 14 ♘d4 is routine and superficial. The manoeuvre ♘e1-d3 (or ♘e1-c2-e3), which Smejkal preferred, offers richer possibilities. Vukić-Suba continued 19 ♕c2 ♖c8 (again ...d5 is in the air!) 20 ♕d2 ♘c5 21 ♖e1 ♕a8 22 f3 ♕b8 23 ♖cd1 ♗a8 24 ♘de2 ♖ed8 25 ♘d4 ♘cd7 26 ♕f2 ♘e5 27 ♕e2 ♘c6! and White faced an unappealing decision: to take on c6 and consequently face the freeing ...b5 or to continue to enjoy his nice position, which he unfortunately did. To his misfortune, 28 ♘c2 ♘h5 29 f4 again allowed 29...b5, this time in worsened circumstances. In short, White was expecting to achieve something by doing nothing – he stood in the same place until his opponent seized the initiative. The rest was all downhill.

13 ♘d2 ♖c8 14 ♕e3?!

The further course of events suggests that 14 h3 is preferable.

14...b5! *(D)*

W



No matter how powerful White's centre looks, we repeatedly find that it is vulnerable to tactical blows.

15 cxb5 axb5 16 a3?

On 16 ♘xb5 Ljubojević planned 16...♖c2 17 ♖db1 ♘g4 (17...♗a6 comes into consideration as well) 18 ♕d3 (18 ♕e2 is suspect in view of 18...♘de5 19 ♘d4 ♗a6 20 ♕d1 ♖xb2 21 ♖xb2 ♘xf2) 18...♖c5 with compensation. In spite of that, White should follow that line. The timid text-move creates weaknesses on the queenside and can bring little hope.

16...♗c6 17 b4 ♘b6 18 ♖ac1?

This time 18 h3 was needed to prevent the following knight manoeuvre.

18...♘g4 19 ♕f4 ♘e5 20 ♗f1 ♘bc4 21 ♘xc4 ♗g5! 22 ♘xe5 ♗xf4 23 ♘xc6 ♗xc1 24 ♘xb8 ♗xb2 25 ♘xb5 ♖cxb8 26 ♖b1 ♗xa3 27 ♖b3 ♗c1 28 ♘xd6 ♖a4

At the end of the forced line White has lost an exchange without compensation. His passed pawn will be blocked and useless.

29 b5 ♗a3 30 ♘c4 ♗c5 31 ♘e5 ♖a2 32 ♖f3 ♖d8!

Ljubojević exploits his advantage efficiently.

33 ♗c4

33 ♘xf7 fails to 33...♖f8 34 ♗c4 ♖xf2, while 33 ♖xf7 is insufficient due to 33...♗d4 34 ♘c6 ♔xf7 35 ♘xd8+ ♔f6 36 ♘xe6 ♗xf2+, etc.

33...♖c2 34 ♗b3 ♖b2 35 ♔g2 ♖dd2 36 ♘d3 ♖xb3 37 ♘xc5 ♖xf3 0-1

Power in the centre is worthless if it cannot be converted into an attack. As time passes such a stationary power tends to weaken until some tactical blow shatters it. Neither Vukić nor Uhlmann found a way to make use of their spatial advantage and control of the centre. The fact is that White's position is not as good as it appears. The double fianchetto is not in my opinion efficient and the pawn-structure is too susceptible to the tactical blows ...b5 and ...d5. Besides, as I mentioned above, the standard manoeuvre with ♕e3 and ♘d4 just cements White's position in its fixedness. Black, on the contrary, although somewhat short of space, has at his disposal subtle pressures and tactical threats.

Karpov – Adams

Wijk aan Zee 1998

English Opening

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 g3 b6 5 ♗g2 ♗b7 6 0-0 ♗e7

I have recently noticed some fresh developments in this variation. After 6...a6, Pogorelov-Rodriguez Lopez, Mondariz Balneario 1999 continued 7 ♖e1 ♗e7 8 e4 d6 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♘xd4 ♕c7 11 ♗e3 0-0 12 ♖c1 ♘bd7 13 f4 ♖fe8 14 g4 with a sharp position. After 14...h6 15 g5 hxg5 16 fxg5 ♘h7 17 g6 ♘hf8 18 gxf7+ ♔xf7 White struck by 19 ♘d5.

In Zeller-Wahls, German Ch, Bremen 1998, White saw his chances in another direction. After 6...d6 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♕xd4 a6 9 ♗e3 ♘bd7 10 ♘d2 it was clear that his target was the backward d6-pawn. In comparison with the earlier 10 ♘g5, putting the knight on d2 has one advantage – either knight can jump to e4 depending on the circumstances. Then 10...♗xg2 11 ♔xg2 ♕c7 12 ♘de4 ♗e7 13 ♖fd1 0-0 14 ♘xd6 ♖fd8 15 b4 led to complications in which White was able to create good chances.

7 d4 cxd4 8 ♕xd4 d6 9 e4

In search of untrodden paths, the game Nogueiras-Åkesson, Olympiad, Elista 1998 continued 9 ♗g5 a6 10 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 11 ♕f4 0-0 12 ♖ad1 ♗e7 13 ♘e4 ♗xe4 14 ♕xe4 ♖a7 (White was threatening 15 ♕b7) 15 ♘d4 ♖c7 16 b3 ♖e8 17 a4 with active possibilities.

9...0-0 10 ♕e3

When a later ...♖fe8 is played, the queen won't feel at home on the e-file. Besides, as we saw in the previous example, on e3 it is also exposed to ...♘g4.

10...♘bd7 11 ♘d4 ♕c7 12 b3 a6 13 ♗b2 ♖fe8 14 ♖ac1 ♖ad8 15 ♖fe1

Sooner or later the e4-pawn will need protection and in some cases ...d5 can be answered by e5. We saw above that Vukić was forced to play the ugly f3 to prevent it, blocking his fianchettoed bishop and creating a new weakness at g3. In my opinion White should either keep the queen at d4 and play ♖d1 followed by ♘e1, or do what Karpov does now.

15...♕b8

This is the proper place for the queen, whence it may support ...b5 or sometimes, when White is not strong enough on the e-file, it may support ...d5 as well by preventing e5.

16 ♖e2 ♗f8 17 h3 g6

The backward d6-pawn being unassailable, Black can activate his bishop on the long diagonal.

18 ♖ce1 ♗g7 19 ♕d2 ♘c5 20 ♕c2

Moving the queen around will not improve the position. 20 ♗a1, preparing 21 ♘c2, makes a better impression.

20...♕a8 21 a4 ♖c8

The black rooks harass the white queen.

22 ♘f3 ♖ed8

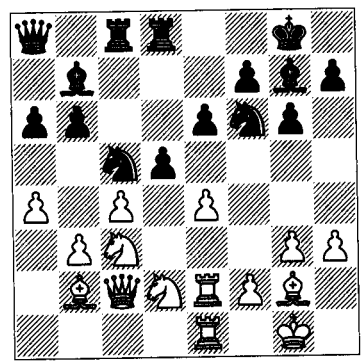
As long as the d6-pawn is unprotected, 22...b5 does not work because of 23 axb5 axb5 24 ♘xb5 ♗xe4 25 ♖xe4 ♘cxe4 (or 25...♘fxe4 26 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 27 b4) 26 ♗xf6, etc.

23 ♘d2

Now 23...b5 has been thwarted, but the central blow has become possible...

23...d5! *(D)*

W



It is now White who has to be careful. Such freeing moves generally release positive energy.

24 exd5 exd5 25 cxd5

If 25 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 26 ♗xg7 there is 26...♘f4.

25...♘xd5 26 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 27 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 28 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 29 ♘c4 ♘d3

Fortunately for White, 29...♘xa4 30 ♕a2 ♕b5 does not work due to 31 ♕a1+ ♔g8 32 ♕f6 ♕xb3 33 ♘d6 ♖b8 34 ♖e3 ♕a2 35 ♖1e2 ♕d5 36 ♖e8+ ♖xe8 37 ♘xe8, when Black will be mated.

30 ♖d1 b5 31 axb5 axb5 32 ♖ed2 bxc4 33 bxc4 ♕xc4 ½-½

Even in the hands of Anatoly Karpov, an expert on the spatial advantage, the position yielded little. The lesson is simple: an apparently nice position, which does not contain germs of active play, tends to deteriorate. The next

game makes an instructive comparison.

Anand – Illescas
Linares 1992
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘b5 d6 6 c4

By making use of the temporary weakness of the d6-square, White has managed to set up a central bind by playing c4. However, he will now be obliged to retreat his knight to the edge of the board.

6...♘f6 7 ♘1c3 a6 8 ♘a3 b6

In reply Black builds the same pawn-formation as we had in the previous games. We shall put aside the question of whether he can strike at White's centre at once by 8...d5. Suffice it to say that 9 exd5 exd5 10 cxd5 ♘b4 11 ♗e2 poses some difficulties for Black. Ever since 11...♗c5? was punished in Karpov-Van der Wiel, Brussels 1986 by 12 ♗e3! ♗xe3 13 ♕a4+ ♘d7 14 ♕xb4 ♗c5 15 ♕e4+, Black has relied on the stronger alternatives 11...♘bxd5 or 11...♘fxd5, but still has had problems to solve.

9 ♗e2 ♗b7 10 0-0 ♘b8

Black uses some time to improve the position of his knight; the relatively closed character of the position makes this feasible.

11 f3 ♗e7 12 ♗e3 ♘bd7 13 ♕d2 0-0

Comparing with the previous games we find the same defensive row of black pawns on their third rank, but White's set-up features some important differences. Instead of the double fianchetto, his bishops are posted more actively, exerting pressure towards the queenside. At the same time the e4-pawn is well supported by the f3-pawn. As a consequence Black's counterplay with ...b5 or ...d5 is much better controlled.

14 ♖fd1 ♕c7 15 ♖ac1 ♖ac8 16 ♗f1 ♖fe8 17 ♔h1 ♕b8 18 ♘c2

It is time to improve the position of the passive knight on a3.

18...♘e5 19 b3 ♗a8 20 ♗g1

Both sides try to place their pieces in the best available positions. The bishops stay out of the way on f1 and g1 in case the e-file opens up or if f4 comes into consideration.

20...♖ed8 21 ♘d4 ♗f8

21...d5 is no good due to 22 exd5 exd5 23 ♘f5 ♗f8 24 ♕g5 (obviously threatening 25 ♘h6+ followed by 26 ♕xe5) so manoeuvres designed to bring the pieces to their optimal positions continue.

22 ♖e1 ♘ed7

This time 22...d5 does not work because the a6-pawn is hanging.

23 a3 *(D)*

The time of preparations is over, and White starts to put his queenside majority slowly to work. The hastier 23 b4 would be met by 23...♘e5 24 ♘a4 d5.

23...♗b7 24 b4 ♖c7

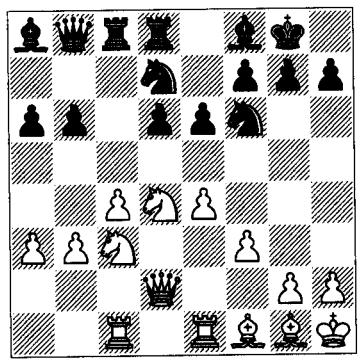
Or 24...♘e5 25 ♘a4. Black's lack of space is starting to hurt.

25 ♘b3 ♗a8

25...♗c6 26 a4 ♗a8 comes into consideration.

26 ♘a4 ♗c6 27 ♘b2

B



The first phase of the pawn advance is over and the next stage requires preparation. White's pieces support his pawns in a harmonious relation. Note now how well posted the white bishops are.

27...♗a8 28 ♗d4 ♖dc8 29 ♖ed1 ♗e7 30 ♕f2 ♕b7?

Restricted to their last two ranks, Black's pieces can do little except wait passively. The text-move leads to a rapid downfall. There was nothing better than to wait by 30...♗c6.

31 ♘a4 ♖b8

31...♖c6 is somewhat better, even though 32 ♘xb6 ♖xb6 (32...♘xb6 is worse due to 33 ♘a5, etc.) 33 ♗xb6 ♘xb6 34 c5 dxc5 35 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 36 ♖xc5 ♘fd7 37 ♕d2 looks difficult.

32 ♘xb6 ♘xb6 33 ♘a5 ♕a7 34 c5 dxc5 35 bxc5 ♘c8 36 c6 ♖b6 37 ♖b1 1-0

It is quite obvious why Anand won. His pawn-structure and well-posted pieces made it possible for him to prepare a gradual advance on the queenside while Black had no counterplay whatsoever. The advance generated a strong initiative, which led to a material advantage. The process of metamorphosis triumphed. This time it was Black's position which deteriorated in spite of its apparent firmness. Under pressure, it slowly lost its elasticity and reactive capability. In the end, Black was suffocated.

Polugaevsky – Ljubojević
Bugojno 1980
English Opening

1 ♘f3 c5 2 c4 ♘f6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 b6?!

4...e6 is more active. The fianchetto development will soon be called into question.

5 ♘c3 ♗b7 6 f3

Seeing that 6...d5 does not work in reply, White prepares 7 e4, which will limit the range of Black's light-squared bishop and increase White's influence in the centre.

6...d6 7 e4 ♘bd7 8 ♗e2 e6 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♗e3 0-0 11 ♕d2

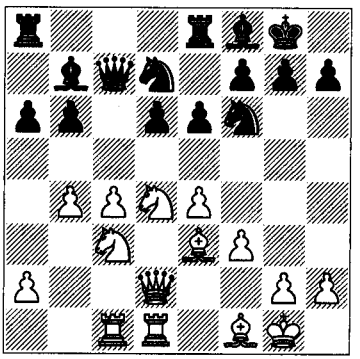
What Anand needed to work hard to achieve, Polugaevsky has been offered on a plate. All he need do is bring his rooks to the proper files, perhaps improve the position of his bishop(s) and he will be ready for action...

11...a6 12 ♖fd1 ♖e8 13 ♗f1 ♗f8 14 ♖ac1 ♕c7

14...♖c8 would slow down White's advance, but would not change the inexorable course of events. White has a queenside pawn-majority which has good support from his pieces and now starts to advance.

15 b4! *(D)*

B



15...♖ac8 16 a3

The step taken by the b-pawn is first consolidated before White prepares any further advance.

16...♕b8 17 ♘b3

Given that his a-pawn may advance later on, White's knight is excellently placed at b3.

17...h6 18 ♕f2 ♗c6 19 h3 ♗e7 20 ♖b1 ♕c7 21 ♖dc1 ♕a7?!

Black is not prepared to sit and wait, but this invites more trouble. 21...♖a8 is better.

22 a4 d5

22...♕b8 23 a5 bxa5 24 ♘xa5 ♗a8 25 c5 is also painful for Black.

23 exd5 exd5 24 a5 ♗xb4

Alternatively, 24...dxc4 25 axb6 ♕b8 26 ♘a5.

25 axb6 ♕b8 26 c5

An ideal metamorphosis: a pawn-majority has yielded connected passed pawns. White's position virtually plays itself.

26...♗b7 27 ♗d4 ♖e6? 28 ♘a2 ♗a3 29 ♖c3 ♖d8 30 ♘a5 ♗xc5 31 ♗xc5 ♘xc5 32 ♕xc5 d4 33 ♘xb7 ♕xb7 34 ♕c7 ♖b8 35 ♕xb7 ♖xb7 36 ♖c8+ ♔h7 37 ♗d3+ g6 38 ♖c7 ♖bxb6 39 ♖xf7+ ♔g8 40 ♖b7 ♖xb1+ 41 ♖xb1 1-0

Once again we learn the same lesson: it is not enough to have a firm position without weaknesses. A lead in development and a spatial advantage become an initiative and the initiative provokes and causes weaknesses, unless counter-steps can be taken. We have analysed many examples that lead to an indisputable general conclusion: waiting entrenched rarely helps and therefore an attack must be met by a counter-attack. Force tames force. Whether the reaction should come on the same wing or elsewhere depends on the circumstances; all the board is at our disposal. In the circumstances of the dynamic centre, the correct outcome of the two sides' plans ought to be some form of dynamic balance.

Conclusions

When I wrote the first draft of the book it happened that the chapter on the dynamic centre was as long as those on the open and the closed centre put together. It was not deliberately planned that way. It is simply indicative of its frequent occurrence in master practice, the practical importance of the subject and its general relevance to the state of theory in our times. However, it is not only in length that it differs from other chapters. If we recall the games selected to illustrate the topic, we see that apart from the game Em.Lasker-Napier, chosen as an introductory game, and a couple of games

played in the 1950s and 1960s, introduced on purpose as a revealing comparison, the mass of selected material is from the final decades of the 20th century. It was not your author's whim, but a simple reflection of what we see in tournament practice.

The open centre could be illustrated well by games played as early as the Romantic period. The elite players understood the essentials of the open centre and were well versed in the pertinent methods to use in it. The selected games show us that the leading players understood the hidden connotations of the fixed centre as well and left extraordinary lessons on the subject in all the periods of the 20th century. Practical experience in other types of closed centre was absorbed more slowly and it was not until the 1960s that a large number of meaningful games demonstrated a broad understanding of the subject. Of course, towards the end of the century the rich experience resulted in new ideas and more precise judgements broadening our view of the closed centre in general, but strong players perceived and understood its underlying mechanisms decades ago.

We could hardly say that of the dynamic pawn-centre. From the early decades of the 20th century onwards we come across games of the highest quality, but we owe them to the inspired moments of a few great players rather than the conscious understanding of the period in which they lived. Especially in the field of such an eminently modern system as the Sicilian, no systematic knowledge existed before the Second World War. We recognize the first serious explorers in the field in the Post-War generations of the Soviet players, a few celebrities and a number of dedicated, first-class analysts. As the years passed, the field of exploration broadened and the number of explorers grew proportionately, first in Europe and then all over the world. Towards the end of the 20th century an impressive number of professional players had their own little Sicilian secrets and the mass of theoretical information was multiplying. Everything that we knew about the dynamic centre half a century ago has been questioned and re-examined. We owe the fascinating process of our time to the spirit of experimentation, readiness to enter the unknown and to take risks, but first and foremost to a new attitude borne out of conviction that all is possible if supported by concrete calculation. That seems to be the only general maxim the modern interpreter of the dynamic centre is ready to accept without reservation, to play and to live by.

Of course, a professional master can afford this healthy attitude, but at lower levels one needs something reliable on which to lean one's judgement. It is quite easy to say that general rules and maxims are useless, that only specific analysis of specific cases leads to the truth, but how then could we upgrade our play to the level on which we can evaluate the course of a chess game on our own? How, then, could chess teaching function?

When analysing this selection of games, a careful reader will be able to collect grains of practical chess wisdom, draw lessons from some typical points and motifs, and form some little guidelines. They are always a good starting point. It takes time and experience until we reach the moment when we can do without them. The games in this book have been selected and designed to help the reader to acquire the feeling for pawn-structures and pawn movements. It is on the basis of that feeling that we become able to perform precise analysis and form correct evaluations of our own ideas and interpretations. I hope this book will help the reader in his endeavours.

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How should pawns be used to fight for the centre? How does the central pawn-formation affect planning for both sides? These questions are central to understanding chess, and are the primary subject-matter of this book.

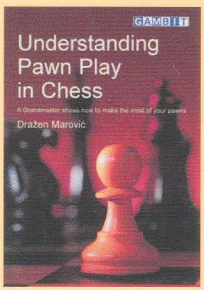
Following on from his successful book *Understanding Pawn Play in Chess*, Dražen Marović now moves on to discuss more complex central pawn-structures and their impact on play both in the centre and on the wings. He begins by surveying how the pawn's role in controlling the centre has been developed over the last 150 years, and how this has led to the refinement of concepts such as the 'dynamic' backward pawn and the positional exchange sacrifice. The bulk of the book is devoted to discussions of the main types of centre:

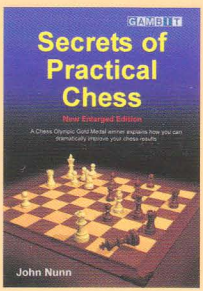
- Open Centre
- Closed/Blocked Centre
- Fixed Centre
- Mobile/Dynamic Centre

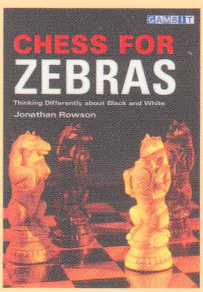
In each case, the reader is helped towards a deeper understanding of the key strategic ideas by the author's use of carefully chosen instructive examples from practice.

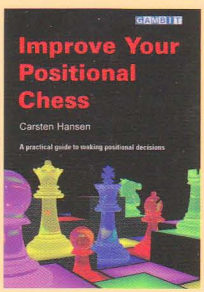
Dražen Marović is a grandmaster from Croatia, who has won medals as both player and trainer for various national teams. His pupils include Bojan Kurajica, World Under-20 Champion in 1965, and Al Modiahki of Qatar, the first Arabian grandmaster. Marović has a wealth of experience as a writer, editor and television commentator on chess. He is a former trainer of the Croatian national team.

Other chess titles from Gambit include:









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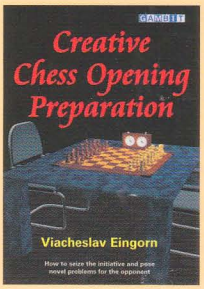

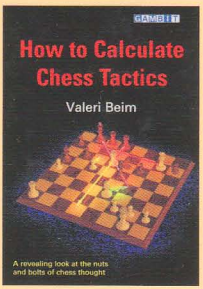

ISBN-13: 978-1-901983-43-2
ISBN-10: 1-901983-43-9